THE

GOLD-WORSHIPPERS:

OR,

THE DAYS WE LIVE IN.

VOL. II

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A *FUTURE* HISTORICAL NOVEL.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "WHITEFRIARS."

"Corrumpere et corrumpi, SÆCULUM vocatur."
TACITUS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
PARRY & CO., LEADENHALL STREET.
1851.



THE

GOLD-WORSHIPPERS.

CHAPTER I.

GULLIBULL Villa, or Putney Palace as it was popularly called, stood—where those who seek it now will not find it. Perhaps, through an accident which we may afterwards take occasion to relate; perhaps, because there never was such a place at all in the transtamesine suburb, and we have been pleased to place it there—*lucus à non lucendo*—purposely to avoid malicious identification in the real locality.

It was certainly a very grand dinner party, wherever it was held. The greatness of the occasion, and the wealth of the Gulli-

bulls, were amply asserted. Mrs. Gullibull had the satisfaction that morning at church to hear the Stubbses in the next pew discuss what was about to happen, and relate how a whole omnibus full of cooks and waiters had been seen to arrive at Alderman Gullibull's lodge. She felt the news would spread all about the parish, and that it would soon be as universally known she had received the great Mr. Humson at dinner with a numerous party of distinguished fashionables, including two lords and an honourable mistress!

All Putney was indeed on the stare to witness the arrival of the carriages; all Putney knew where they were going. Mrs. Gullibull took care of that. The gates of her grounds were thrown wide open; the charity-children coming from church gazed with intense interest and wonder up that usually hermetically-closed gravel walk, and caught a vision of the paradise with which Sternhold and Hopkins had familiarized them, in the stately files of hollyhocks and magnificent

phalanxes of dahlias drawn up within. Let us hope at least that the poor children attached some meaning to the dreary psalmody they were continually screeching in concert.

The house and grounds, independently of celestial associations, were very grand and showy indeed. Perhaps a fastidious taste might have considered that the house looked a little too new—that it had something of impudent pretension in its great, broad, red-brick façade, turned up with white, like a soldier's coat. But cavil was easily refuted; the house was in the Elizabethan style, and as the architect could not be expected to build antiquity, the rawness of effect must be imputed to that circumstance only. Old Elizabethan mansions are usually umbraged in wood; partly grown over with ivy, and tenanted by cawing rooks and crows of immemorial freehold. These are things not to be purchased with money, and it was with money the Gullibulls did all their doings. If even they had bought some ancient patrimony of the sort, they

would very probably have improved it into something very like the one they now possessed. It is a well known fact, (at least we have heard Mrs. Sparkleton relate it as one,) that when old Gullibull first removed to his country house, from Fagg-lane, he complained very bitterly that he could not sleep for the "d—d nightingales about it." She did not indeed repeat the epithet, for that would have been unladylike, but she unmistakably indicated it. It was not likely, therefore, that the alderman would have spared rooks and ravens. On the other hand, Mrs. Gullibull detested trees because they shadowed her flowers, and hindered their growth. Haddon Hall would, between them, have become Putney Palace.

Yet it certainly was a splendid flower-garden, and the conservatories were in the finest order. We do not at all agree with Mrs. Sparkleton, in affirming the effect resembled that of a glaring *papier-mâché* tea-tray, in which a house of fire is surrounded by flashing cocoa trees, with a landscape of mother-

of-pearl and gilt emerald dust. She declared that the very roses looked coarse and bold, and that the dahlias were the most impudent looking creatures she had ever seen, considering that they were not rational things. There was, we must admit, a little too much of everything; but everything was of the best and most gorgeous sort that money could procure.

This superfluity of effect was still more visible in the furniture and arrangement of the grand drawing-room, in which the company were received. It was only lately completed, or else being opened only on stupendous occasions, like the present, to sunshine and air, retained a disagreeable smell of varnish and new upholstery. The magnificent carpet, in whose vast nosegays your feet buried themselves as you walked, seemed too good to be trodden on; the walls shone with unmitigated lustre of gilding and garish pattern; the great mirrors, the chandeliers, the innumerable ornaments, the table-covers, the great glass conser-

vatory, filled as it seemed, from their intense colours, with African plants, and tenanted by screaming macaws in bright cages, composed altogether an overpowering glare and glitter that pained the eyes to gaze on.

Amid this gorgeous chaos sate Mrs. Gullibull, at the height of her glory—happy and flustered beyond expression. Hot as the weather was, she wore a tremendous scarlet brocade satin dress—still on the principle of neutralizing her complexion. But in vain: agitation and the fatigue of arranging everything for the reception of such distinguished guests, had bestowed on her fat visage the ruddiest glow of that mountain rouge, familiarly known by the epithet of "beggar's red." A prodigious turban, jewelled and laced like that of an eastern sultan, crowned her brows. Mrs. Sparkleton always insisted that the superb gold chain she wore was her husband's aldermanic badge, borrowed for the occasion. But her necklace, and earrings, and

brooch, and bracelets—she could not pretend that of them—and they were equally gorgeous.

Charity Green had endeavoured to prevail upon her aunt to mitigate her splendour, with something cool and reposive—such as a white lace scarf, or even a blue one, both of which she possessed. But unluckily Mrs. Gullibull took it into her head that she looked more becoming without any neutral tints; and nothing could induce her to alter this view of the case. She even began to suspect Charity of some envious plot to diminish the grandeur of her appearance—perhaps to bring her nigh her own level, for Charity was very plainly dressed indeed on this occasion. She wore a white muslin gown, very simply garnished with a green sash, and the only ornament of any value she possessed, which Midas had given her, a brooch set with emeralds.

Mrs. Gullibull was vexed to find that she could not induce the girl to change this costume, or at least to add to it with certain

garnitures she was willing to lend her for the purpose. Charity desired, even with tears, that she might be permitted to remain as she was, and protested that her sole ambition was to be unnoticed. There were a quiet sadness and resignation of late in Charity's demeanour, which at once provoked and moved Mrs. Gullibull. She satisfied herself with declaring that she was a foolish, timid hare-of-a-thing, that would never make any figure in the world, and let her take her own way. In truth, Charity desired rather to observe than to be observed; she had determined to ascertain, at whatever pain to herself, what foundation there might be for the suspicion which Midas's extreme harshness and avoidance of all explanation had latterly given her. Women are more resolved even than men, on some points, to touch the talisman of truth, at any risk of turning the fool's paradise around them into a desert of sand.

Midas was as usual the perfection of fashion, and stood behind his mother's chair,

or rather throne, like an heir-apparent as he was, in the exact attitude in which he had walked from the glass, nearly choked in his white cravat; helping her to do the honours with great mechanical propriety. As to the alderman, he was busied in showing some city friends, who had arrived early, the vast improvements he had made in his property, or intended to make—in which they took, apparently, very great interest, as people always do in the ideas of rich proprietors.

The dinner was to be as late as Mrs. Gullibull could positively prevail upon her husband to allow it to be. But still it remained to her sorrow so unfashionably early, that she was obliged to apologise in her invitation for the circumstance—to her west-end friends, to show that at least she was aware of the impropriety—to those of the east to make them so. Six o'clock; but long before that hour arrived, Gullibull, senior, had eaten two dinners, one under

the name of a little "snack of something," the other admitted to be lunch.

A good deal of company had assembled before Mrs. Sparkleton arrived. She always spent the last moment possible at her toilette, and had a great aversion to a long sessions before dinner. Lord Fitzhauton, she knew, had the same dislike, and never cared much to identify himself with his new family, consequently would not arrive early. Midas had to sustain the shock of several disappointments before he heard the footman, whom he had instructed to that effect, bawling from the entrance, at the highest pitch of his voice, "THE HONOURABLE MRS. SPARKLETON!"

It was an important day for Midas, and he felt it. On this day he meant to parade before the assembled guests—personages of great wealth and influence, and whose good opinion he anxiously desired to enjoy—that it would be his own fault if he did not marry the rich, beautiful, and aristocratic lady, whose united qualities would, he was

certain, make him a mingled object of envy and admiration to the whole city. It was a day on which Midas was determined to behave so that Charity might, if she pleased, perceive the whole truth of his meditated desertion. He had been gradually, and very judiciously, as he thought, preparing her for a full reception of this important conviction, by treating her with the utmost neglect, sneering or snarling at all she said or did, and sedulously avoiding any opportunities of direct explanation. His ambitious hopes had received the greatest encouragement possible; at least so his mother interpreted Mrs. Sparkleton's promise to receive his proposal by letter. His sister had effectually dissipated all apprehensions of a rival in Lord Deville, by informing her mother, in the strictest confidence, that his lordship had told her he never had the slightest intention to marry Mrs. Sparkleton, nor ever would. Lady Fitzhauton kindly added, "on account of her flirting ways;" but

Midas secretly thought he would find a trick to break her of them, if once she was in his power.

With all the suspicions Mrs. Gullibull must have entertained of some previous arrangement between her son and niece, the dazzling vision before completely blinded her backward glances. She thought she had been mistaken; that Charity would surely have spoken; that she never could have remained so long a silent and humble dependent in a house of which she had received an invitation to be one day mistress. At all events, it was no business of hers; if other people were satisfied, she had every reason to be delighted with her son's new choice and exaltation in the world. She was not bound to know if people didn't tell her anything; no doubt they had both found out they didn't suit, and had agreed to relinquish any foolish agreement that might have been entered into.

How proud was Midas Gullibull of his new choice, and how he contemned the folly

of his old one, when he saw them enter together. The graceful, swanlike glide of Mrs. Sparkleton into the chamber, the perfect ease and elegance of her manners, were indeed in formidable contrast with the bashful, hesitating demeanour of Charity Green, who, besides, stumbled in the long nap of the carpet as she came. Perhaps her attention was too much taken up in observing the exchange of greeting between Mrs. Sparkleton and Midas to attend to her footing. The latter's familiarity and warmth of reception were noticed by everybody, with various comments—by none more emphatically than by Mrs. Sparkleton herself, who drew back her once spotless glove from his hot pressure, with almost visible disdain, and replied to his "My dear Mrs. Sparkleton, I've been looking out for you this hour!" with a freezing "I hope I am not late, Mrs. Gullibull? but *I* shall not beg Mr. Gullibull's pardon if I am, for he has spoilt my glove."

"Naughty boy! but people can't contain

themselves always, and I dare say he's as glad to see you as I am, and I had rather anybody hadn't come than you," said Mrs. Gullibull, apologetically.

"What, even the great Humson himself!" replied Mrs. Sparkleton, with a smile. "But I know it is all kindness; it reminds me of my Newfoundland dog; when he comes out of the water, he insists on shaking himself on me, and on me only, he is so attached to me. Is it not so, Mr. Midas?" And without waiting for an answer, she glided on to salute Lady Fitzhauton and her lord.

Charity had begun almost to like Mrs. Sparkleton. She had been ordered by her aunt, and she submitted, though with great fear and reluctance, to receive all the lady visitants, and escort them to a chamber where they could remove their out-of-doors gear. She was sustained in this task by a supposed French femme-de-chambre of Mrs. Gullibull—an Irishwoman, who, on the strength of a great deal of impudence, a

pretty smattering of French, picked up in a short sojourn on the Continent, and the change of a letter in her name, was acknowledged to be perfectly *au fait* under the style and title of Mademoiselle Murphie. But even thus powerfully allied, Miss Green had a nervous dread as to how she should be able to execute her office, especially in regard to Mrs. Sparkleton. But in truth she found her the least distressing of the whole group. The perfect ease of Mrs. Sparkleton's manners in general put people at their ease about her, if they had any natural sense of politeness; for refined manners are in reality only a return to the primitive freedom and grace of unsnubbed humanity. Mademoiselle Murphie pronounced she was the only lady among the numbers claiming the title whom she waited on that day. Her whole appearance, now, in full dress, and dressed with all the resources of her genius—Mrs. Sparkleton had a real genius in dress—excited very different feelings from what one would have imagined in

Charity Green. A real unmixed sentiment of admiration—that abstract love of the beautiful and graceful always intuitive in finer natures—made her contemplate her rival, as she might well have deemed her, with delight, as she would some rare work of art, however untutored in connoisseurship. But when she saw the coldness, and heard the satirical allusion to Midas's endearments, which few beside herself in the company appreciated—singular as it may seem—Charity did not like Mrs. Sparkleton half so well—she did not like her at all! She had wondered if it was possible that such a lady would marry Midas for his money; there was nothing else in him, she could not help owning to herself, to attract so dazzling a being. But she was wounded, poor soul, and very deeply, at the too visible contempt with which he was treated and merited. She knew, or felt, or feared, that the fine lady had given him to expect better things, and she hated her for a moment as an unjust and ungenerous coquette. She

scarcely liked to look at Midas, for fear he should imagine she was triumphing in his deserved confusion. Innocent soul!—the obtuse Midas, perfectly insensible to or unconscious of any maltreatment, perseveringly followed Mrs. Sparkleton through the room, annoying her with introductions, and preventing her from speaking with the people she knew. Coquetry pays its penalties too, like all other earthly enjoyments.

Mrs. Sparkleton had also rather liked Charity Green. She was the only thing that seemed quiet and unobtrusive in the house. She perceived, by one or two little services she rendered her, that the silent girl had some taste in dress: that won her esteem. She saw that Charity's little bit of a lace apron was exquisitely worked, and learned that it was made by herself: this increased it. Only she was a little surprised with a question which the oddity addressed to her, after she had blushingly admitted this fact. "Do you think a person

could make a living by working lace like this, ma'am?"

Charity herself could not tell why she had asked so strange a question: only she thought a fine lady, in the habit of buying the finest materials, must know.

"I really can't say—it depends on what sort of living, I should suppose," she replied. "I can only say I should be glad to purchase such when I'm in want: I never saw any Honiton half so good, and very rarely, Mechlin."

We must introduce our readers to some of the personages whose acquaintance Midas thrust on his bride-elect. We know several of the company. The Fitzhautons, Lord Deville, Miss Scurmucheon (in spite of her prejudices against *Sunday dining*,) had arrived. There were three or four great city dames, invited by Mrs. Gullibull to see what grand company she kept when she chose. There were some half-dozen young ladies, in light-coloured satins and flowery muslins, simpering their sweetest. There

was the Reverend Gilbart Ruddimac—a wonderful thing—a Scotchman and a Puseyite divine! But the bishop who patronised him, and his college, were of that persuasion. There was a country squire, who had come up on some railway business—very rich and very stupid—Sir John Foghie. There were two or three spriggish young city men, Midas's personal friends, in fine waistcoats and white chokers; which is all that need be said about them, and they said no more about themselves. Their business was to eat and drink and be silent, and afterwards to tell Midas that his "gal," meaning Mrs. Sparkleton, "was a d—d pretty woman—and that they didn't wonder at his having her if she was as well *lined* as she had good outside show!"

There was another person not to be so lightly dismissed. It was Mr. Bagshawe, the retired attorney, Midas's godfather. He was greatly detested by the whole family, but he was constantly invited to all their parties. He would have been offended at

any omission of the sort, and it was understood that he meant to leave all his money, and he had a good deal, to Midas. To be candid, he had by no means a winning look; a peevish, sour, disappointed one, on the contrary. He looked as if he were perpetually taking a dose of salts and senna! This might be accounted for on the score of habitual bad health; for nearly fifteen years he had given himself out to be on the continual verge of death, with a disease of the heart. Nevertheless he lived on, and there were some people who imagined he never would die. And to oblige any one, he certainly never would. He was besides very ugly; cadaverously pale and yellow, with a large nose, and a melancholy, ill-cut, thin-lipped, nervously twitched mouth. There was a splenetic bitterness and snappishness in his tones, which certainly completed a not very engaging portrait. A misanthropic contempt and distrust of mankind he had acquired, he was wont to declare, by a

thorough acquaintance with them. God knows whether it was not as much by the disordered state of his biliary secretion!

The great man of the day had not yet arrived. The alderman, however, came in, as soon as he heard Mrs. Sparkleton was there, with a reinforcement. Mr. Deputy-this, and Mr. Alderman-that, were duly introduced to the "nobs," as he styled his titled guests, and the extra warmth of his greeting was almost as cordially reciprocated by "Maggie Lauder," as that of his son had been repulsed. There were two noticeable persons in the alderman's train. One was Mr. Rustisaw, his chief clerk, whom all the arguments of Mrs. Gullibull to prove his disqualification for good society, had not availed to exclude from an unvarying hebdomadal invitation to a seat at the alderman's dinner-table. A lean, excessively-anxious-looking, bending-necked, deferential, silent, little, bald-headed old man, Mrs. Gullibull was afraid that he bore an

uneffaceable stamp of the counting-house, and was only reassured when she saw that nobody but Charity Green took the slightest notice of him. Mrs. Gullibull had no idea what a number of elevated people have by no means any clearer personal marks of aristocracy, to vindicate their claims to its distinctions.

The other was a personage whom we scarcely know how to describe, or how to assign him a station in society. He was not a merchant, he was not a clerk, he was not a professional man, he was not a gentleman—in more senses, than in that of an individual who has no specified calling. He had no capital, no property, no salary, and yet he lived on the fat of the land, was always particularly well dressed, wore rings of very considerable value, on a very coarse hand, indeed; had an office in the city, was invited to all the city feasts and balls, could second a resolution (a little ungrammatically), propose a toast in good set terms, and was

agreed on all hands to be a very rising young man. What was he then? We do not know. We know what he had been. He had been a banker's clerk in London; a calico-printer in Lancashire; principal manager of a joint-stock bank in the south of England, which broke; and now he lodged in the spare rooms over a warehouse in the city, with his name on a great brass plate at the private door up a dark court. His name was Lawless: and that name was to be seen on the committees of almost all the railroad directions in Great Britain. He had also shares in several very unproductive mines in Wales, and was agent for numerous companies which meant to get charters as soon as possible. Mr. Rustisaw, who most cordially hated and dreaded him, called him "a commercial gamester, a penniless adventurer;" which he retaliated by heartily despising Rustisaw as an old formal fool, and almost calling him so to his face. Lawless had obtained a very considerable

influence over Alderman Gullibull, which brought these opposing appreciations into very frequent concussion, and his bold and reckless counsels were daily getting more and more into favour with the great corn-merchant and railway speculator.

CHAPTER II.

THE dinner hour came and past, without bringing the expected distinguished guest. In spite of the pleasure which several of the personages took in each others' company, this delay began to be felt. Love himself cares not to be balked of his dinner too long; and, but for the fact that the poorer people are, the more they seem to like to get married, and the larger families they seem to be blessed withal, we could somewhat unsentimentally conclude, that good victualling is essential to preserve the passion in any vigour. At all events, we have always been most in love ourselves after dinner except on the first occasion;

but, as that is some little time ago, we cannot refute a general principle by a particular fact.

People were undeniably growing impatient. But Mrs. Gullibull insisted they should wait on, and gave the company very clearly to understand that they were of inferior consequence to the person waited for, and therefore ought not to complain. And it was surprising—rich, noble, talented, haughty as several of them were, how philosophically all of them fell into this view of the question. Some that would not have displayed much patience in waiting for a duke, a minister, a first-rate genius, or an opera-singer, dispelled all outward signs, at least, of an opposite feeling in waiting—for what? For a man who was considered the embodiment of the only greatness which the age still reverences—enormous wealth.

He came at last. The rumble of his chariot-wheels, delightful in the ears that listened as those of Sisera in his mother's,

was audible in the gravelled avenue below. The dignity of mock-royalty was contented with keeping a well-dressed mob in waiting exactly three-quarters of an hour, three minutes, and a second. Lord Deville observed the exact time, for he had an odd way of drawing inferences from trifles, which often induced him to be particular in them. The idol entered, and all the worshippers were instantly—we cannot exactly say prostrate, except in soul.

The characteristics of the demigods of antiquity were, however, not at all observable in the apotheosis in question. A broad-set, stout, plebeian figure, with a fat, oily visage, a good-natured, jolly smile, and so corpulent that he waddled as he entered at his brisk pace—and behold the Mammon of our day! Mrs. Sparkleton had expected to see a man consumed by care, with a brow perpetually hazed with calculations, haughty, arrogant, and imperious in manners. Instead of this ideal, the Napoleon of Steam turned out to

resemble his prototype of war; for whereever he was not resisted, or his supremacy contested, he was really the most affable, good-humoured, playful despot imaginable. There was no fear, on this occasion, that his temper might be ruffled by any species of contrariety. He was received with more than all the respect and homage due to his semi-divinity of wealth.

"Now, ladies and gents.; now, my lords and my ladies, come forward, and let me introduce you, one by one, to Mr. HUMSON!" said Mrs. Gullibull, uttering the last words with as much dignity of tone as if the bubble monarch were in reality the autocrat he was styled, half in jest, but *three parts* in earnest.

"Ay, ay, Mrs. Gullibull shall be my lord chamberlain, and tell me all your names at full swell, like a court circular," said the monarch, in his quick, tripping, Yorkshire accent. "Now, then, Mrs. Gullibull, who's who? all here? Let's be quick about it, for I want my dinner, and I dare

say ye're all tired with waiting for me to come and help ye eat it. But I couldn't get away. I wish they'd make a Better Observance of the Sabbath Bill for me expressly. I haven't a day of rest all the year round!"

But in vain did the plebeian jollity and heartiness of the elevated individual himself struggle with the impression that he was something above humanity, and to be treated as such. Mrs. Gullibull introduced the company with as much formality and state, as if she had in reality been a lord chamberlain at the levee of a demi-god. Mrs. Sparkleton herself was a little fluttered when presented, far more than when a girl, at her first drawing-room, to the demure and punctilious observation of the wife of William IV.

Rank, beauty, fashion, wealth, all bending in homage before the crowned imposture of the day, what wonder the climber grew giddy at length on his elevation, and, as sailors phrase it, lost his head? The idol

was certainly worthy of his worshippers; and if, like other false gods, he was obliged to resort to fraud and deception to keep up the illusion of his power and supremacy, surely the crawling priests and frequenters of the temple were more to be despised and contemned than the object of their adoration!

Yea, Miss Scurmucheon herself was humble in the presence of this deification of wealth,—she who had affected all her life unbounded contempt for all its mercantile manifestations. The over-wrought civilization of the nineteenth century had only reverted to the fashions of the earliest and most barbaric of its progenitors, which deified the qualities it most admired. It bowed the knee to an incarnation of its own insatiable love and adoration of money—the dominant passion of our age and nation. It had no apology, and asked none, for its idol-worship, but money! It was not charmed with eloquence, fascinated with beauty, won by great services, to deify. But what is the wonder—since all

things, in our days, are to be had for money, and nothing without? Mrs. Sparkleton felt herself in the presence of a god-like power, which she imagined would certainly grant to his votary the means of paying off a world of inconvenient debt, and of resuming that course of lavish extravagance, which she called "living up to one's station."

It was her peculiar happiness to receive the great man's arm in descending to the dining-room. This honour was Mrs. Gullibull's due, but she transferred it in the most graceful manner. "Come, Mrs. Colonel Sparkleton, take Mr. Humson's arm. You know, you two are our *prima donnas* to-day, and you shall lead the way for us all."

In vain did Mrs. Colonel Sparkleton refuse the precedence assigned her. Mrs. Gullibull was bent on yielding it, and rather than prolong a ridiculous struggle, the two prima donnas were obliged to accept the lead. And although she had

calculated for two or three days on the pleasure of exchanging a few private—perhaps, *innocently tender*—words with Fitzhauton, who, she knew, would be on the look out for the opportunity, she complied with pleasure. We must, however, declare, that it was not until Mrs. Gullibull had pushed matters so far as to announce that nobody could think of taking the lead from a duke's granddaughter, which, she said, she had only discovered Mrs. Sparkleton to be, a few days previously, in the Peerage—that the lady yielded. She had almost forgotten the circumstance herself, never having derived any particular benefit from the grandeur of her mother's birth, except being wearied to death with her allusions to the circumstance.

Midas was thus foiled in an attention which he had intended to pay Mrs. Sparkleton; but he did not for that reason devote it to her inoffensive rival. He handed down one of the Miss Fishers, who all the week after believed and warmly

cherished the idea that she had made a conquest of the rich Mr. Gullibull, junior. He was foiled also in an attempt to get the seat next to Mrs. Sparkleton, though Mr. Humson was called to the upper end of the table, to sit at Mrs. Gullibull's right hand, while his partner in the descent occupied the place of honour at the alderman's. Lord Fitzhauton secured the seat to himself, by ceremoniously standing beside it, as if anxious that everybody should take it, until everybody was seated elsewhere.

Miss Green was not, however, wholly neglected on this occasion. She was a good listener to a valetudinary's complaints; no one grudged her the post; and Mr. Bagshawe's arm was hers to support, rather than to be supported by, to dinner. She found herself seated, she scarcely knew how, between him and Lawless, right opposite to Midas, *the* Miss Fisher, and Sir John Foghie, baronet. She never knew that Mr. Rustisaw sate next to Lawless, though she wondered once or twice, as soon as she had

recovered her senses, bedazzled by so much company and grandeur, where he was.

'Lord Deville and Lady Fitzhauton were placed nearly opposite the latter's husband and Mrs. Sparkleton. Her ladyship, according to a custom she had, sate biting her little red under lip to make it redder. But it did not much matter how anybody was placed. Soon no voice was audible but that of the great man. Had any one been willing, he would not easily have made himself audible amidst the quick rattle of the idol's oracular utterances. But no one thought of such profanation: It seemed as if there were raspings of gold in his very tones, which the hearers might, if properly attentive, gather into ingots. Besides, no one would have been attended to who had tried to make a diversion. Lord Deville attempted it once in the course of dinner, but he was dismissed into silence with a magisterial waive of the monarch's hand. In the presence of the

great lion of the hour, no inferior roar could claim attention.

Had Apollo and all the Muses been rehearsing the inspiration of all the great bards to come—if any more are to come—they would not have been listened to with any attention, compared with that which hung on the jargon of business terms in which Mr. Humson made his first mysterious impression on the auditory. It satisfied them that he understood perfectly what he was talking about, because they did not. The harangue commenced in reply to a question with which Mrs. Gullibull took care, like an amiable hostess, to introduce the subject on which she knew her distinguished guest would shine the most. It seemed he had been into the country, "making things pleasant" on a railway, which had long been in a very different condition. The mere magic of his presence—his mere acceptance of the office of chairman, had restored the credit of the line;

and raised the price of its shares from something to something, Mrs. Sparkleton did not exactly catch from what to what, but it was a matter provocative of astonishment, to judge from Mrs. Gullibull's "Deary me!"

But attentive as she was to her royal guest's observations, still Mrs. Gullibull's notice was a little divided by the necessity of superintending the preliminaries of the banquet, and in giving directions to the servitors, some of whom were rather awkward, and not much accustomed to officiate in their present position. Bob Button, the tailor's son, was nervous, and one of the waiters from London was a trifle the worse for Alderman Gullibull's strong ale.

Mrs. Gullibull gratified the pride of her heart all the time of grace—which the Reverend Gilbart Ruddimac delivered in a solemn, rhetorical manner, deepened in effect by a Scotch drawl,—in surveying the magnificent effect of her banquet while yet under cover. Crowded with silver plate,

the table was also so profusely garnished with vast gilt épergnes, stemmed like Jack-in-the-Greens with flowers—that large and long as it was, there was scarcely convenient room for anything. The odours of so many living plants, mingling with the smell of the soups—and there were at least a dozen sorts, including the green-fatted turtle in profusion—that Mrs. Sparkleton was almost overpowered. She was obliged in fact, the moment grace was pronounced, to request one of the servants behind her to remove a great mass of carnations beside her, which nearly made her sick with their mighty fragrance. The man, concerned for the honour of the table, pretended not to hear her twice; and it was not until Lord Fitzhauton peremptorily commanded the request, that obedience was rendered.

It was a glorious moment for Mrs. Gullibull: there were as many waiters as persons to be waited on, excepting only one guest. That was Mr. Twittlewit—did we forget to mention that he came? Mrs.

Gullibull forgot that he was coming, which accounted for that one drawback on the perfection of her arrangements. But the stern marshalling of her eye informed Bill Button that he was to attend both on Mr. Rustisaw and Mr. Twittlewit. The poor fellow's agitation was greatly increased by this addition to his responsibilities. It is true that Mr. Rustisaw was not very complex to be waited upon: a convulsive silent jerk of his neck-bone, accepted whatever was offered him. But Twittlewit was a different sort of creation. He knew the French names of all the dishes, and asked for what he wanted with a pure Parisian pronunciation, which utterly bewildered Bill Button, and even puzzled the intelligence of the head waiter of the great London hotel, who, from behind the alderman's chair, marshalled the feast, and furtively indicated the dishes demanded, as far as he himself, in his own expression, was "up to them." He was an immensely fat man, in a vast white waistcoat, a perfectly cut black dress coat,

and with a Johnsonian mass of physiognomy which seemed meant for better things. Mrs. Gullibull intended and expected that he would be taken for the family butler, though they did not keep one. This fact but too plainly appeared in the course of the dinner. Liberally as Mrs. Gullibull had calculated the drinking capabilities of her guests, the wine she had assigned fell short of their needs, or else the town waiters embezzled a few dozens. The champagne and hock positively flew about the table. Mr. Humson drank in reasonable proportion to his eating, and he had at all events an appetite of the heroic dimensions. Lawless drank like a fish: to be sure, in recompense, he praised the beverages incessantly, and swallowed champagne and hock indifferently, whatever kind of cork happened to be drawn the nearest. Sir John Foghie was a four-bottle man, and did not count French wines as anything in his ration: it need scarcely be said that he did justice to the claret. The silent Rustisaw himself could drink like a

quicksand, more especially as he thought Mrs. Gullibull took no notice of his proceedings (which she was able to do, on ordinary Sundays) and imagined that he should thereby acquire courage to open his mouth and speak to the GREAT MAN. His soul was parched to do this; he had some most important questions to put on certain railways; in which his master, nevertheless, had no shares. It is not yet time to explain the reason of this craving in one who had always expressed the most profound aversion to every form of the speculative mania of the day—and, to return from our digression, Mrs. Gullibull too plainly destroyed the illusion of the Johnsonian waiter, by rising in the middle of the repast, leaving her place vacant, and sallying forth to superintend the delivery of a new batch of hock, champagne, and claret. Even in that supreme hour, Mrs. Gullibull would not trust the key of her cellar to any of her foreign allies, or domestic forces. The experience of a life was not to be thrown

away even in the enthusiasm of a crowning triumph!

Mrs. Sparkleton liked champagne. She always took a glass of it before she went out anywhere to dine, to add to the brilliancy of her eyes. We record this fact for the benefit of the ladies, as she certainly had the most sparkling and bewitching eyes in the world, in consequence, we presume, of this precaution. At least, if we may credit Lord Fitzhauton on the former point, who whispered something to that effect, with a complaint that they were too uniformly directed towards the "talking machine" as he was pleased to designate Mr. Humson. He was repaid with a glance so full of vivacious tenderness and expression that—wonderful to relate!—it spoilt the taste of Lady Fitzhauton's soup, on the other side of the table, or rather, we believe, made her put it into her mouth sooner than she had otherwise intended, for it was far too hot when it entered the receptacle in whose mysterious caverns good things

disappear as constantly as the Rhine at Schaffhausen. But for very shame, she would not have swallowed it; but the company was too fine, Lord Deville watched her, she was aware, too closely to effect the manœuvre necessary with any decency. And therefore she scalded her mouth and throat, as became a person in good society under the circumstances.

For a long time, Lawless was the only articulately-speaking being, Homerically speaking, who ventured to intersperse the great man's remarks with any of his own. But Lawless was a very impudent fellow, and was besides quite as familiar as Mr. Humson himself with all the details of the art of making "things pleasant;" he had been at the railway meeting in question, had been unanimously, at Mr. Humson's nod, constituted a director on the line, and had taken a good number of shares in it; in fact, he was a species of reversed jackal, and followed his illustrious patron wherever he went, to share the carcasses secured by the

lion' saws. He was an open, unblushing flatterer; no king before Mr. Humson ever had one so superlatively impudent; but it did not seem like flattery at that time. Lawless was also of course the first to spurn the fallen Dagon when his hour of overthrow came.

Yet to the most uninteresting business details, mixed with coarse adulation, vulgar anecdotes of vulgar persons and things, horse laughs, the reasons for which they could only guess, did Mrs. Gullibull's most refined guests attend with the utmost complacency. The haughty, witty, satirical, bore-detesting Mrs. Sparkleton; the polished and profound Deville; the lounging, impatient Fitzhauton; his vain and pettish wife; the justly-irritated Sir John Foghie, who had come to town nearly mad with rage because a railway was coming as close as it could do, under the windows of his dining-room; the religious Miss Scurmucheon; the bitter attorney; the uncomprehending Charity Green; Mrs Gullibull,

whose tongue no power, human or divine, could in general restrain; all listened with their souls in their ears, as if to a message of universal salvation. Lord Deville might be excused for his share in the general submission; he was a statesman, and a man was speaking who was regarded as the oracle of money, on whose golden wheels all modern statesmanship must either run or come to a standstill. Lady Fitzhauton might be excused, for money was the tutelary genius of her house. She had a right to be proud, to exult in its present incontestable superiority over every species of rivalry. But how in the world did Mrs. Sparkleton almost totally forget that the man she loved—we were going to confess, but there was such a large infusion of other feelings, that, perhaps the word, luckily for her propriety and ours, is a little too strong,—was beside her? How came she to prefer that jargon of ten-and-a-half per cents., shares and preference shares, and deferred dittos, to all the silvery things she

might have expected to hear insinuated from his lips? O, gold! indeed thou art triumphant over the humanity of our days, stronger than death! stronger than the love of woman! stronger than that intensest kind of all, in which vanity, rivalry, and the senses, combine to render a return delicious!

Midas listened, too, with an anxious attention that deprived the viands he ate as literally of savour as the touch of his namesake of antiquity, which turned them into indigestible gold. Half yielding to the dazzling hopes inspired by his father's enthusiastic confidence, half terrified by its excess, and tormented with gnawing doubts, it was no time for Midas to enjoy his dinner.

Enthusiasm, indeed! The enthusiasm of a soldier for a valorous and ever victorious leader, was as nothing compared with Alderman Gullibull's for his glorious master. He interrupted Lawless in the midst of a glowing description of the feasibilities discovered by himself and his lion, in the

newly undertaken railroad—an extension here, a branch line there, new issues of shares, fresh borrowing of money, unbounded capabilities. "I say, Humson!" he shouted from his end of the table, "let's have a snack in it; allot me five hundred, at least, before they get in the market. Do, now, there's a good fellow! And you shall have a slice in it, Bonnie Maggie, if you'll promise not to cry 'roast beef!'"

"I?—roast beef?—Oh, no!" said Mrs. Sparkleton, a little puzzled.

"O fie, Mr. Gullibull! no bargaining; remember, it is Sunday!" remonstrated Miss Scurmucheon.

"How mildly she says that!" muttered Mr. Bagshawe to Charity Green. "I'll wager now she wouldn't mind ruining a poor tobacconist or a newspaper fellow, that kept his shop open in church hours."

"But it is past five now," replied Charity, in a very low tone, and blushing scarlet, in the dread that Mr. Bagshawe's observation might have been overheard.

"I am no advocate, my dear madam, for the discussion of business matters in the seasons of rest ordained by the church and the ecumenical councils; but with regard to a puritanical observation of the Sabbath—" began the Puseyite parson, when Mr. Humson crushed his remark in its first division with an avalanche-like descent—

"You shall have them, Gullibull!—but I shall be obliged to extend the scheme; I have so many applications!"

CHAPTER III.

THERE was some little pause after this; it was impossible even for a god to both eat and talk together. And Mr. Humson *could* eat: indeed, he ascribed a good deal of his success in life, to what he called keeping "the steam up"—"plenty of coal and water in the engine," and other appropriate witticisms. Lawless always quoted the authority whenever the extent of his appetite provoked criticism. He declared that his own most fortunate conceptions had always visited him after the second bottle. He certainly acquired a great deal of useful information—secrets which he could put when sober to advantage,—in the course

of the numerous carouses into which he managed to thrust himself.

It must be conceded, to Mrs. Gullibull's undying credit, that the dinner was worthy of the appetites brought to it. Even the potatoes were hot—a thing which, as Mrs. Gullibull very truly, though somewhat too vain-gloriously enunciated, but very rarely happens at a large dinner-party. The citizen most skilled in dinners, that is to say, the oldest one present, Mr. Alderman Portsoken, declared that it was unexceptionable; that he had never tasted finer turtle at the Mansion House! The flush of triumphant genius visited the fat face of the Johnsonian waiter behind Mrs. Gullibull's chair when he heard the words.

Alderman Portsoken had innumerable excellent stories to tell of the dinners he had eaten. He remembered some special tureens of which he had partaken, as far back as the middle of the reign of George the Third. He could almost tell you to a dish what was on the grand table when the

allied sovereigns visited the city in state, in 1814. He remembered precisely what the King of Prussia ate on that memorable occasion; and how the Hetman of the Cossacks sopped the green fat off his soup in his bread, and seemed to relish it as much as if it had been train oil or candle grease. He knew all the good things of Sir William Curtis by heart, and was intimately acquainted with that text-book of modern wit, Joe Miller. This worthy sate next to Mr. Twittlewit—at least, there was only a young lady squeezed between them—and it may be imagined how much they amused one another.

Neither Alderman Gullibull nor Alderman Portsoken, however, seemed to sympathize in taste with Mr. Twittlewit, who persisted, to Bob Button's ever-increasing tremor, in his partiality to the French dishes, while he did not do bare justice even to the turtle-soup. One reason for this might be, that Mr. Twittlewit had a very delicate stomach, and Bob Button

unhappily put the thumb of the white kid cleaned gloves, which Mrs. Gullibull had furnished him with from her own treasury of relics, pretty deeply into the soup. In vain did the worthy alderman admonish Twittlewit not to waste his appetite on kickshaws, and relate an anecdote very much to the purpose, how a young man at a Lord Mayor's dinner, in his own time, had eaten so much of a leg of mutton that he could not even taste a morsel of a delicious roebuck, sent by his late Majesty George the Fourth, as a present, from the Highlands, on his late tour in Scotland, (being about five and twenty years previously,) and which was the primest which he, Alderman Portsoken, ever remembered to have eaten. He then wished to know Mr. Twittlewit's opinion how long a haunch of venison ought to hang before it was fit for the spit; and declared that, in his own judgment, he thought it ought to fall from the pantry hook of its own accord before it could be considered sufficiently tender to be

cooked. Twittlewit replied with indignation, that he imagined it would then be fitter to be buried than cooked, and provoked a long explanation from the Alderman, in which he proved that venison, like medlars, must be rotten before it comes to its full flavour and succulence.

Meanwhile Lawless, whose natural impudence was greatly enhanced by the wine he kept pouring in plentiful streams down his throat, kept up a perpetual noise of discussion and argument about him. He had soon, as he called it, "smoked" Sir John Foghie—an old Tory of the old school, with all the old fixed ideas which the world has left behind, as completely as an express train leaves its starting-point in the rear. Lawless was, on the contrary, a Manchester man, with all his ideas as spick and span new, as ready to be changed, as the stations on a just-opened line, when the directors are magnanimously hazarding their necks to show how fast the public may get from

one end of it to the other, at the future like little risk.

Amongst his reigning ideas, Sir John had two, which exerted a rather tyrannous supremacy over the rest. He thought it the greatest wrong that ever was inflicted on humanity, that a railroad should be brought through his park, close by his windows, merely because a parcel of impudent engineers pretended it was the straightest way between two points they chose to connect. The other was a still more energetic conviction, that giving people cheap bread would infallibly ruin them, and that to "save the country" it was necessary at any cost of civil war, riot, famine, what you will, to keep up the price of wheat to sixty shillings a quarter, at least.

A conversation on these points began at first between Sir John and Twittlewit, and was carried on pretty amicably, until Lawless broke in. Twittlewit sympathized

heartily with Sir John in his rage at the contemplated destruction of his fine old mansion and scenery, which a Titanic trench was about to divide into nearly two equal parts, besides displacing the course of a river, and destroying his fish-ponds and shrubbery. Sir John, indeed, began to have some apprehension, from the sentimental tone of his neighbour's condolences, that he was a political adventurer of the Young England school—a class which had not yet got into favour with the old Tory gentlemen. Sir John had, indeed, a great aversion to "political adventurers," in which class he in general considered all persons must be who were clever, but not rich, nor grandly connected, and who were making their way by the sheer force of their talents. His own had been too often, as he expressed it, "served out by that sort of people," to have any real trust or liking for them. But it was sweet to be coincided with, and he enjoyed even the highflown and almost unintelligible conceits

of Twittlewit, on the subject of the destruction of ancient properties, ancient rights, ancient ideas of all sorts—rather vaguely, but very much—until the unlicensed Lawless interfered.

"What! do you pretend, sir—can any man in these enlightened days, peer or ploughman; I say, can any man—I don't care who his grandfather might be, a lord or a tinker—or what kind of house or grounds he may possess, with old associations, and all that kind of stuff—but can you really think, sir, that a railway—a railway is a thing which *must* go a-head, sir!—and can you for one moment pretend that a railway should be turned aside—a thing, sir, that wont turn aside for a mountain, for a sea—merely to please the fancy of some stupid country proprietor? I beg your pardon, sir, I don't mean you, of course. But let us suppose, for one moment, that a very stupid, obstinate, country proprietor set his face against a railway going through his grounds, do you really mean to

say that it oughtn't to go through just the same? Why, if one that I was interested in wanted to go through a churchyard in which all my relations had been buried for centuries (though I had none that I know of farther back than my grandfather,) I'd vote for its going slap through them, bones and ashes, and graves, and all, as coolly as if it were through a dust-heap; and I can't but say, that I should consider it monstrous illiberal in me, and that I ought to be scouted out of society, if I didn't think so!"

"Well, sir, you may think—you may think as you think proper! But I can only say," returned Sir John, not in the most temperate manner possible, "I can only say, sir, that if English gentlemen possessed one tittle of the spirit that was in them formerly—if there were only a few more of my opinion, than unfortunately the trimming, truckling, dastardly fashion of the day has left among us—I can only say I would fight blood up to the stirrups sooner than any rascally, low-bred fellow

from a town should presume to come into my own property and dictate to me! Why, if an Englishman's house is his castle—do you think that a wretched, pettifogging, broken-down attorney, like the scoundrel who has started the extension line through my property, a fellow on whom I should consider to bestow a slash of my whip too great an honour—a scamp of that kind to come and say to me, 'Sir John, you *shall* do this and you *shall* do that—here's an Act of Parliament for it!'—do you think, sir, I would suffer that, if there were one spark of English blood left throbbing in my veins?"

"You are paid for it, sir, you are most unconscionably overpaid!—Railways pay like trumps! Where could you sell your land to such advantage as you will to the company you are abusing? A company, which to my own knowledge—it's the grand Diddleton and Little Hope Branch Extension, is not it?—I'm a director, and I know ——"

"But I don't want to sell my land, sir; I want to keep my land, sir," returned the exasperated proprietor; "and Mr. Gullibull promised I should have an opportunity to speak to Mr. Humson, and explain how it might just as easily go by a tunnel through Flinthill, where it would not hurt my prospect, and——"

"My dear sir, your land is only worth forty thousand pounds, and it would cost us a hundred and fifty thousand to make a tunnel through Flinthill," said Lawless. "Still you can speak to Mr. Humson, for, of course, difficulties in the way must lower prices, and I have some idea myself of buying in that line. Diddleton is a good opulent busy little town for a terminus; and though I don't profess I should buy as a permanent investment, myself, a handsome premium might be made, I should think, by getting the people there to do so?"

"I should think so," replied the baronet, more complacently.

"In fact, I'll try Humson myself, when I

have studied the thing a little more," continued Lawless. "It is but a little engineering to make matters go one way or another; and I'll go down to Diddleton to see how the wind blows among the people there shortly — if you'll have a little patience. No hurry home, I suppose?—are an M.P. arn't you, Sir John?"

"For Diddleton, sir. But I'd rather not have a railway there at all—the people get so unmanageable wherever railways go—and I don't want interference in my election matters," said Sir John, disquietly. "Couldn't you manage it altogether that way? I've seen lots of others projected that never came to anything after the first calls."

"There are cases, of course; but Diddleton has an act," replied Lawless. "So you elect yourself, I suppose, Sir John? We must have that looked into in its turn, sir. Depend upon it, sir, that a more thorough reform in our representative system is as essential as in the circulating

medium, which——" But we spare our readers the dissertation introduced by this preliminary. Lawless had a grand crotchet of his own, though not exclusively confined to himself, that "this country," as he always called England, with cosmopolitan coldness, could only be saved by a system of paper money, which should entirely supersede the need and use of bullion.

On this subject, Lawless was endless; on this subject only had he definitively made up his mind; on this subject he had actually written a book! A book full of tables, of almost unintelligibly bad grammar and worse reasoning, but still a book—and one, moreover, in which it was demonstrated, that by taking the writer's advice, "this country" might easily pay off the National Debt. Lawless had not the slightest regard as to what classes might be injured, or even destroyed by the success of his system—much less for individuals. He triumphantly admitted that his large issue of paper would reduce it pretty nigh to the

worthlessness of the old French assignats, or of shares in the South Sea Bubble after its explosion. That was part of his project; for by making the said worthless paper a legal tender, he calculated that the National Debt might be paid off without the slightest real loss to the Exchequer, and merely at a nominal valuation by the national debtor.

The very idea of this grand piece of jugglery excited the wrath of Mr. Bagshawe, the retired attorney, whose money was chiefly in the funds. He took up the cudgels against Lawless with the utmost asperity, while Sir John rather admired the scheme, not being able to discern that it would have any effect on the value of land; that rents might also be paid in this "legal tender." The difference of opinion between the two politicians speedily rose to the dignity of a dispute, almost of a quarrel. Bagshawe denounced the plan as the most infamous and extensive swindle and fraud which it had ever entered the brain of man to conceive, not even excepting the railway

mania of the day, which he pretty clearly placed in the same category. Charity Green found herself seated between two disputants, who exchanged the fiercest arguments over her plate, seemed quite to have forgotten her existence, and talked what appeared to her a chaos of unintelligible sounds, which yet seemed to exasperate them both to the highest possible pitch. In fact, there is nothing on which men so ardently dispute, or are more ready to wage war to the knife upon, than the unintelligible.

We know not how Sir John Foghie managed it, but after awhile he introduced a new element into the contention. Lawless was speaking of the enormous advantages which would accrue from his system, in what he called the reduction of the great burdens of the country, the universal lightening of taxation which might follow—especially if the army and navy were summarily dismissed the service. Thereupon Sir John Foghie declared, it was as he had always

thought,—that the sole object of the present race of popular politicians was the entire destruction of the English monarchy, the dethronement of the Queen, and the bringing in of a French invasion. He proved this by the fact of the intended dismissal of the army and navy, and not without much cause, understanding the words literally, as it pleased him, for the sake of argument, to do. In support of this view, he appealed to Lord Fitzhauton, the only military man present, as to the certain results. Fitzhauton's utter contempt for the preacher of such a heresy was, in reply, expressed so freely, that Lawless was greatly irritated, and persisted in his opinion with the utmost heat and violence. Then Mrs. Gullibull made a slight diversion by insisting, with great politeness, that Mrs. Sparkleton, as the widow of a Waterloo officer, and one that used to dine with the Duke on Waterloo days, was best entitled to deliver an opinion on the subject. But Mrs. Sparkleton declined, on the score of incapacity, and

the dispute continued between the former belligerents with renewed vehemence. A general action ensued, the question speedily resolving itself into a condition-of-England one, for the diseases of which venerable, but apparently worn-out and rheumatic-in-every-limb, Mother of Empires, every speaker present had some favourite panacea or another.

Even Charity Green! wonderful to relate! By one of those freaks of fortune which not unfrequently happen when they are least expected, Charity was suddenly startled by finding herself appealed to as umpire in a question, of which she understood little more than that two gentlemen appeared to be in a passion about it. This kind of arbitration is not unseldom invoked by antagonists who do not intend to take the decision, if unfavourable, as of any authority. Sir John Foghie appealed to her to show how the merest common sense must be of his opinion, he said —whether, though a lady, and as such unaccustomed to consider questions of politics,

whether it was not plain to demonstration, that the only way to save the country from the dangers ot a revolution of the most horrible description, (Sir John always frightened himself in that manner,) must be to encourage the agricultural interest in every possible way, as the only balance against the manufacturing towns, which were obviously plotting some such consummation?

The first appellant in general enlists the referee in his favour, by the compliment paid to his judgment. But heaven knows how Charity's cogitations wandered into the reply which she delivered.

"But, Sir, I don't think it is the rich people who will try to make a revolution," she observed, with great humility; "and if the poor are so very badly off that they must attempt it, would it not be better for all kinds of people that are well off, masters of all kinds, to allow them better wages—a greater share in the profits of all kinds of work—than they do at present?"

Charity had often been reproached by Midas for the "stupid silence" she was wont to keep in company, but this reply ruined her for ever in the opinion of Mr. Lawless. Sir John himself took a very unfavourable view of her character and intellect, and Charity shrunk back again into perpetual silence, when Lawless exclaimed, with his proper rudeness, "There's a precious opinion, indeed! It is plain, Miss, you are not very deep in political economy. Eh, Sir John? 'It's a pity when charming women talk of what they don't understand!' Why, that's socialism all over!—leads directly to socialism, ma'am! Share and share alike!—until at last the whole world will only be one great workhouse, and everybody in it paupers alike!"

Sir John Foghie looked at Charity as if she were the fabulous monster of antiquity squatting on the way—some sphinx asking questions, meaning all the time to rend th answerer. And, indeed, the great politica

questions of latter times are put very much in that form.

But greatly to Charity's relief and gratitude, Mr. Bagshawe came to her assistance. His tart, snarling tones always drew attention. "Ay, ay, it is always plain enough what you Manchester men would be at in reality: all your projects for the benefit of the working classes mean, when practically explained, cheaper labour and heavier profits for yourselves. For my part, I can't see but what the observation's very sensible, more sensible than most of the inhuman stuff called political economy, under the action of the theories engendered by which the poor of this country have had their faces ground to the dust until——"

"I entirely agree with you, sir!" eagerly interrupted Mr. Twittlewit, without, however, allowing the attorney time to explain his meaning to the necessary extent to justify so unreserved an adhesion. "I entirely agree with you, sir!—for until

England is again the Merrie old England—the England that she was before the upas-tree reign of Henry VIII.—"

"You don't agree with me, sir! I never meant nor asserted any such nonsense as you seem to think—England to the times of Henry VIII.!" returned Bagshawe, with indignation. The general attention was now turned on the disputants—even Mr. Humson's, from a detailed account he was giving to Mrs. Gullibull of the sums of money he expected to make on his new line, the "fellows" he had lately made by letting them have fingers in certain pies—to all which she was listening with her soul in her turban. The vehemence of the controversy turned Lord Deville from the amused observation he kept up of Lady Fitzhauton's sulkiness, only broken at times with gleams of smile extorted by his own dexterous, low-toned compliments. Whispered sugar-plums for the pettish school-girl!—as Mrs. Sparkleton thought them, which were yet administered with

some caution and reserve. Deville was colder than on previous occasions. Lady Fitzhauton's indiscretion of manner admonished him, that it would be advisable to give her some reasons for prudence, before he ventured to depend too much upon her exercising it. A little neglect on his part added also piquancy to the indignation with which she sate, secretly watching her husband's very visible admiration and delight in the society of Mrs. Sparkleton.

The Reverend Gilbart Ruddimac desisted from a polite and *carneying*, but most obstinate Puseyite dispute with Miss Scurmucheon, about the number of candles it was orthodox to allow on an altar. Miss Scurmucheon was decidedly evangelical, and strongly objected to the reinforcement which Mr. Ruddimac declared to be necessary to salvation, in all the parish churches of Great Britain. Miss Scurmucheon, in a less polished state of society, would perhaps have been desirous to burn the maintainer of the Romish error in question: as

it was, she only wrangled, with a most vinegar aspect and a bolt-upright, stiff, viperish expression, that it was one.

Midas was roused from calculating how much the splendid set of diamonds worn by Mrs. Sparkleton might be worth, by finding that his mother had plunged into the argument, with the dauntless intrepidity of a diver into a whirlpool. Lawless had yelled out—"Henry the Eighth's time, sir!—and pray what are we to do with our present population?" and proved how babies had increased, were increasing, and ought to be diminished, ever since the fortunate era in question—to the consternation of the ladies, and until Mrs. Gullibull could stand it no longer. She descended into the arena with a clash of arms, for her sympathies as a mother of some standing, and a woman, were roused rather fiercely. "Did any one ever hear such trash?—Why, Mr. Lawless, I'm ashamed of you—you that intend to be a parliament man, too, if all goes well! Prevent poor people from having children?

You couldn't, in the first place; I'll defy you to show how, for if you hinder them from marrying, they'll do worse; that's certain! And whoever heard of such cruelty, if you could? I'm sure poor people haven't so much enjoyment that we should try to—"

"There, mother! that's enough about babies! you are making all us gentlemen blush!" interrupted Midas.

Hereupon Sir John Foghie reiterated his opinion, that the best and only way to feed our surplus population is—to starve them. At least, so Lawless somewhat violently interpreted his declaration, that nothing but the restoration of the Corn Laws could save the country. Lawless renewed his argument, that it was the National Debt which crushed the industry of the country, and his grand theory for discharging without paying it, and without injuring the credit of the country, or breaking faith with the public creditor. Bagshawe resumed his cudgels with vigour, and Mrs.

Sparkleton, accustomed to the light, airy gaiety of prandial conversation in well-bred society, was almost alarmed at the noisy contention which followed. At least, she looked at Lord Fitzhauton as if she were a little frightened—and he looked in return as if he was quite ready to die for her! There was luckily no occasion, for Mr. Humson over-ruled all in a loud despotic voice, by declaring that the only thing the country needed to make it the most prosperous in the world was, a system of Railways by which its whole surface should be covered as if with an iron net, and which would reduce the price of every commodity, by the instantaneous power of conveying it wherever it was wanted, thus conferred, and at the same time enrich that almost innumerable class which had embarked its capital in stock of the kind.

Alderman Gullibull so strenuously joined in this view, that he drank healths with Mr. Humson on it. The example was imitated, though it was rather a novelty to the

fashionable guests. Lawless was good enough to announce, that he should take wine with Lady Fitz (it seemed he had forgotten the rest of the name) and apropos the syllable retained, began to relate an anecdote about a friend of his, in "Woodson and Mactakeall, the great woolstapler's" house, called Fitzsnobbs. Lord Fitzhauton frowned, and looked tremendous at the speaker; and Mrs. Gullibull was excessively vexed, for she knew that Fitzsnobbs was only a commercial traveller in that distinguished firm, and thought Lawless's allusion was intended to diminish the lustre of her son-in-law's aristocratic name. "Fitzsnobbs, indeed!" she exclaimed, indignantly; "as if everybody didn't know his father and mother were as lawfully married as the alderman and me ourselves, and his name was Snobbs—and I'm sure the son can't have taken the name for any property, for there never was any in the family."

"No, his father and mother weren't

married till it was too late, and he took advantage of the circumstance!" said the alderman, laughing so heartily that he was obliged to throw himself back in his chair. "And there's my wife there—Mrs. Gullibull there—I believe if our name would stand it she would try and bastardise it too! She wants to persuade me—and she has got some old Guy at the heralds' office to persuade her—it's a fact, that we are descended from——"

"The prefix to my name, sir!" interrupted Lord Fitzhauton, with flashing eyes, "is not a brand of bastardy: it is the ancient Norman word for 'son,' and at the time my ancestors assumed it—"

"Oh, I'm not speaking of what it was in old times—but I'm going to tell you how at last we found out the Gullibull arms," said the alderman, quite composedly. "We've been hunting for them these six months, and I've got a pretty penny to pay for it—"

"Very well, sir, but we can talk of that

another day," returned Fitzhauton, impatiently.

"Why, if Fitz only means 'son'—we have lots of sons you know—the Robinsons, the Nicholsons, the—lots of 'sons,'" conceded the alderman. "I didn't know what it meant, and it don't much matter."

"But you have found out some particular descent in your family?" said Mrs. Sparkleton, with a look of great interest.

"Yes: but you won't easily guess what?" said the alderman. "It's all my wife; she knew we came from somebody; guess who, now?"

"William the Conqueror?" said Mrs. Sparkleton.

"Pho! before him!"

"Alexander the Great?"

"Pho! before him!"

"Adam?"

"No; pho! everybody's from him! You'll never guess. No, it wasn't before William the Conqueror, neither: Henry the Second

wasn't, was he? But Mrs. Gullibull will show it to you after dinner, in the drawing-room. We have a tree up there to show how we grew," said the alderman, still chuckling with laughter, but with some degree of seriousness. "You don't believe it, I see, Mrs. Sparkleton, so I'll tell you how it was. It isn't, perhaps, on the parson's side of the blanket, but—"

"My dear sir!" interrupted Fitzhauton, but in vain.

"It was all proved to me; God knows how!" he continued. "Well, my father, the great chandler in Cripplegate—you must have heard of him, Mrs. Sparkleton?—my father's father never knew who his father was, because—"

"An uncertainty is the best of foundations for a genealogy," observed Lord Deville.

"But, however, his mother's name was Sheepshanks—and in Henry the Second's time there was Ralpho de Mouton, and sheep's mutton, and mutton's Mouton in

French—and so we are descended from a great Norman gentleman about eight hundred years ago who—"

"For shame of yourself, Alderman Gullibull—how can you make a jest of your own family?" angrily interrupted his spouse. "It's this, Lord Fitzhauton! Gullibull's grandfather—"

"Don't believe her; I never had one," persisted the facetious alderman.

"Gullibull's grandfather!"—thundered Mrs. Gullibull.

"—Was no gentleman—but an honest brewer at Sudbury," again interrupted her spouse, in the same tone.

"What's in a name?" simpered Mr. Twittlewit, who had been vainly endeavouring to make his small voice audible amidst the late turmoil, intending to plead in favour of the restoration of maypoles, cricket-matches, tournaments, bows and arrows, and old English cheer, as remedies for the evils of which it was confessedly diseased. "A rose by any other name would smell as—"

"Oh, there's a great deal in a name, sir," interrupted Mrs. Gullibull, still much excited at her husband's ridicule of her favourite folly. "There's Charity Green here, my niece; her methodist-father must needs call her such a name as that; whereas if he had called her 'Victoria,' or 'Clementina,' do you mean for to tell me it wouldn't sound a great deal better?"

"'Victoria,' or 'Clementina' *Green!*" lisped Twittlewit, with as much satire in his tones as he dared put. The poor girl sate quite overwhelmed, and it was incontestably out of pure benevolence, that Mrs. Sparkleton ventured her voice amidst the uproar, and endeavoured to turn attention by inquiring of Alderman Gullibull whether he often spoke in parliament?

"Nay," said Lord Deville, with a smile, "the alderman has been three years in parliament, and we are still on the look out for his maiden speech!"

"But I am always in the House when there's any voting going on—my consti-

tuents must be satisfied with that, for I'm no speechifier, and I think you have too many that are, without me, my lord," replied Gullibull, senior.

"I want my father very much to make a speech, and introduce a bill, about soap," said Midas, from his remote station, where until that moment he had been sustaining a most amusing conversation with Miss Fisher, concerning Margate, from which interesting watering-place she had just arrived. "It would do incalculable good!—and if I could get your lordship to introduce it in the Lords, I know ministers wouldn't oppose it, and it would pass."

"But I know nothing about soap, sir," replied Deville, tranquilly.

"Oh, you needn't—you need only make a speech on it! I'll put you up to everything about it; pearlash, soda, grease, kitchen-stuff—it's all for the benefit of the poor man, and would be sure to be quite popular—it's to take a tax off—but it will be sure to pay better than ever," said

Midas, fluently as a chancellor of the exchequer. "I should be glad to read it to your lordship—my bill, I mean,—and to have your opinion on it. A forcible feature in it is, that I propose in future, Russian tallow shall pay no duty—free trade, you know!—I have a grand speculation in it—but it will do the country incalculable good!"

"Yes, if we all kept our hands clean," said Deville.

"I don't approve—as everybody knows—of free trade policy in general," said Mr. Humson. "But as we use a great deal of tallow on our lines, and above all things it is necessary to keep down expenses, I don't mind, Mr. Gullibull, promising my aid and support on this question if you take it up, and Lord Deville can give us a guarantee that ministers will not offer opposition, for my time is too precious to be taken up in the consideration of questions of abstract policy!"

"It is too *slippery* a subject for me to

attempt to grapple with it," replied Lord Deville.

"We make more use of soft soap than tallow, though, on our lines, eh, Humson?" said Lawless, who could not resist the opportunity of displaying his wit. The monarch smiled with dignified consciousness, and railroads speedily vanquished all Midas's attempts to restore attention to his own peculiar saponaceous policy.

Interested as she was in the matter, Mrs. Sparkleton became so wearied with the discussion which followed, that she was sincerely glad when Mrs. Gullibull at last gave the signal for the ladies to retire. Mrs. Gullibull took a very fair allowance of wine, for a lady, and it needed rather a strong hint from the alderman before she conceived that the time had arrived for her to execute this part of her functions as hostess. "An't you going to make us some coffee, my dear?" was twice repeated before Mrs. Gullibull took the hint.

"Well; I suppose you want to get rid of us now, gentlemen; but mind you don't forget to come to it, as you did the other day, Gullibull," she said, and rose.

There was a race between Midas and Mr. Twittlewit which should open the door for the ladies, but one of the hired waiters, who rushed to show his alertness and obligingness, won it from them both. Lord Deville had foreseen a scramble, and took care not to engage in it. But he managed to press Lady Fitzhauton's hand, imperceptibly, as he removed her chair, and gave her a look of tender regret, when she withdrew, which very greatly flattered her sensibility.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE were few of the usages of English society to which Mrs. Sparkleton in general submitted with more reluctance than being, as she phrased it, "turned into a hencoop after dinner." This occasion was not likely to be exceptionally pleasant among the women with whom her fate now consorted her. The elder dames seated themselves in the superb drawing-room in profound silence, stuffed with eating and drinking, very careful of the possible creases in their rich satins and brocades, and prepared to speak only in monosyllables. The younger ladies dispersed about the room, timidly whispering, and inspecting the curiosities. Charity

could not take her usual work in hand, and therefore only sate, silent and condemned, on an ottoman, gazing with great earnestness, apparently, at the gorgeous rug. Mrs. Gullibull was hot and fatigued, and like the elder Hamlet was accustomed to take a nap always after dinner. But she felt it was incumbent upon her to amuse her guests, and struggle with the fiend of drowsiness, whose bat-like wings began gently to fan and shadow her into repose.

Mrs. Sparkleton's principal consolation, under these circumstances, was to remark how sulky Lady Fitzhauton had become. She enjoyed that, for she was greatly provoked by the parvenue countess's haughtiness of demeanour towards her ever since the affair of the Flower Show. She felt injured, for Mrs. Sparkleton knew very well she had not exerted all her power to make Lady Fitzhauton uncomfortable, from dread of consequences to herself perhaps, or from some better motive for aught we know—for after all Mrs. Sparkleton had some con-

science, and stood in great awe of what people thought on certain subjects. But now she was provoked, and felt a little inclined to let Lady Fitzhauton know, that if she did not give her substantial reasons for her offensive conduct, it was not for want of power. She perceived also, that her ladyship imagined she was achieving a great triumph to herself, and confusion to her adversary, by flirting with Lord Deville. "You do not injure me, but you think you do, so I owe you all the same thanks," reasoned Mrs. Sparkleton, every now and then, to herself, whenever some anodyne was necessary to silence importunate suggestions of prudence and honour.

A chorus of praises of the great man furnished for some time the staple of the drawing-room chit-chat. Mrs. Sparkleton praised him excessively, intending her good opinion to travel. It seemed, she never could have believed that a man not brought up in the best society could have manners so polished and agreeable.

"But you know he is always among dukes, and marquesses, and M.P.'s, and nobs of that sort, now," said Mrs. Gullibull. "They all run after him, and court him as if he were I don't know what—like the poultry after Charity when she feeds them in a morning. She's fond of feeding things. You may hear him talk of my lord this, and the duke of that, till you are quite tired."

"Yes," said Mrs. Sparkleton, very sincerely. "That Lawless, too, seems a very clever fellow; he seems quite *au fait* in everything about business. What is he?"

"Oh, he's up to everything.—I don't exactly know what to call him precisely," responded Mrs. Gullibull. "He is not exactly a stock-broker, but he is a great man on rails—he is in lots of directions, and the alderman goes a good deal by his advice. But what do you think of the way I have finished my new drawing-room, Mrs. Scroggs?"

She spoke to the wife of Mr. Deputy Scroggs, but she looked at Mrs. Sparkleton.

"Quite beautiful, mum," replied the critic appealed to, without looking either right or left, but conscious that everything around her was prodigiously grand and expensive. Mrs. Scroggs was a silkmercer's wife, and spoilt the general application of the proverb, that "shoemakers go the worst shod" by wearing the richest satin robe in the room.

"I don't much like the pictures, but Gullibull buys them, and he is fond of what I call low subjects," continued Mrs. Gullibull. "For my part, I never could see why people should run after those Morlands and Dutch things. The better pigs are painted, I should say, the nastier they are to look at, and I'm almost sure we haven't got a picture without a pig in it. Gullibull was fond of pigs when he was a boy, and they lived at Hackney; and of one in particular. I've heard him say he blubbered like a whale when it was killed for curing—and that accounts for it. But, come, let's try and keep awake. Take my

arm, Mrs. Sparkleton, there's a dear, and I'll show you all my little nic-nacs. They may be all yours, you know, some day, when a certain little event comes to pass!"

"Don't die on my account—if you have remembered me in your last will and testament," said Mrs. Sparkleton, playfully foiling the interpretation which might else have been put on these words. "But I shall not need support round the drawing-room, though it is a very extensive apartment—and will run beside you, like your filly."

"I wish you were, I'm sure!" said Mrs. Gullibull, with almost maternal tenderness. "But I can tell you what size the room is exactly by the new carpeting: let me see, the bill came to two hundred and seventy pounds seven shillings and fourpence halfpenny, and it was seven guineas a yard, so that there must have been——" Mrs. Gullibull began calculating, but unlike Cassio, she was no arithmetician, and

speedily broke down in the reckoning. She offered, however, to measure with her own feet, taking them to be about the imperial standard, which they were not, for they were very short—an advantage in favour of the proportions of the room. But Mrs. Sparkleton managed to divert her from this purpose. It was necessary, nevertheless, to take the tour of the apartment; and round they went, attended by nearly all the other ladies, who mechanically arose from their seats, as if by common impulse, and followed the hostess about as show-woman. Mrs. Gullibull had really a great collection of rich toys, "quite a bazaar,' as Mrs. Sparkleton complimentarily declared, when they resumed their seats. Really rich and rare as money could purchase; but the exhibition was made unnecessarily tedious by Mrs. Gullibull's remembering and rehearsing the exact places, and the exact prices in which, and at which, she had purchased them. Else she gave such singular and mistaken names, or pronunciation, to many of the foreign

articles of virtù, that Mrs. Sparkleton was often highly diverted. She even suffered once or twice from an internal fit of laughter, which she had great difficulty in depriving of any external manifestation.

Still she was a good deal annoyed all the time by allusions she could scarcely feign to misunderstand, to an event Mrs. Gullibull had apparently made up her mind was to happen. To be sure, the latter lady herself did not speak out so fervidly as she would have done if Charity Green—glad of seeming to do something—had not been among the followers in her train.

One hint, however, was pretty broad. "Yes, that's a very pretty yellow ántico, (*giallo antico*,) cost me seven pounds last year at a sale of Christie's. But I've long wanted—and, if a certain event should come off this summer,—I shall go to, the place where they get these Pompey things —it's in Italy, I believe—for wouldn't it be a nice wedding trip for us to go there, as you can speak the language for us all?"

"I should be delighted to visit Italy on so pleasant an occasion," replied Mrs. Sparkleton, watching with amusement the winks exchanged among the elderly ladies. She missed the shadow that fell on Charity's attentive and intelligent expression, for Mrs. Sparkleton's remarks had evidently roused a degree of mind in her which she did not usually display, at least, on her countenance.

"I bought these vases in Paris—they warranted me for certain they were stolen from one of the Sultan of Turkey's harems or *kosks*, I think, they call them—when we were on our famous 'go' there, and Ann picked up her husband as we were coming home—Lord Fitzhauton! What a queer providence it was, and I often think of it, that he should be on board the steamer with us!"

"A good pecuniary providence for him at least," thought Mrs. Sparkleton; and she could not resist turning to Lady Fitzhauton, and observing, "Your ladyship ought to take

an *interest* in these vases, since you have a *principal* share in the appended anecdote. You see I begin to understand mercantile terms; pray come and help us to admire."

"I am sure I won't; I have seen everything a hundred thousand times," replied Lady Fitzhauton, scornfully.

"But custom cannot stale their infinite variety!" quoted Mrs. Sparkleton.

"The duty wasn't very heavy, and if you like the vases you are quite welcome to them; you are quite welcome to them; you could not do me a greater favour than to accept them from me as a present," said Mrs. Gullibull, eagerly; "I'll send them to you to-morrow."

"Mamma, I wonder at you!" exclaimed Lady Fitzhauton, with rude pettishness. "Did you not promise them to me instead of that one you broke at our house the other day?"

"Not that I know of," said Mrs. Gullibull, a little surprised. "But strangers must be first served; not that I consider

Mrs. Sparkleton one, but she is not like one of the house yet, so——"

"I would not for the world deprive Lady Fitzhauton of anything she wishes for!" interrupted Mrs. Sparkleton, with vivacity. "In the way of vases," she should have added; for certainly this rudeness by no means diminished the feeling which prompted her to attempt acquiring something more valuable from her, if a husband may be reckoned so.

"I wonder you can be so disagreeable, Ann! I didn't promise you these vases, and you heard me tell Midas, as yesterday, that if Mrs. Sparkleton liked them, I'd give them to her, because he said she was very fond of expensive nic-nacs."

"You will oblige me by letting me resign all pretensions," said Mrs. Sparkleton, warmly.

Lady Fitzhauton began to feel a little conscious that she had exceeded the bounds of politeness. "I am sure you may have them for me; for now I *won't* have them

if they were worth ten times as much, and if mamma went on her knees to make me take them!"

"In plain English, then, *I* will *not* have them!" said Mrs. Sparkleton, peremptorily.

"Not if *Midas* offers them on his knees?" said Mrs. Gullibull, almost as seductively as her son himself could have done the act indicated.

"Or Lord Deville?" said Lady Fitzhauton, with a sneer and a toss of the head.

"I am sure I wouldn't take anything from a man like *that!* though I must say he is as nice a gentleman to talk with as ever I met with—but after his foo-pas!" said Mrs. Gullibull.

"But he will never make another!" said Mrs. Sparkleton, with an expression better comprehended by Lady Fitzhauton than by anybody else in the room.

"Just like Mrs. Sparkleton to say! She is such a noted *philanthropist!*" said Miss Scurmucheon, looking up from a richly bound velvet prayer book, emblazoned with

her family arms, in which she was reading evening prayers, by way of a succedaneum for not being at church.

"I believe people only grow *misanthropic* out of revenge for the ill-treatment they have received from mankind! and men have not ill-treated me," retorted Mrs. Sparkleton, rather surprised to find herself assailed in Greek, but not discomfited. Still the interruption seasonably turned the attention of the company from the vases, and Mrs. Sparkleton declared she was tired, and took a seat.

"And so am I, I'm sure," said her amiable hostess, imitating the example. "These things are a deal more plague than profit, what with expense, and the trouble of keeping them dusted, and one thing and another."

Miss Scurmuchcon's thoughts were not so much engaged as they ought to have been in her devotions, for the moment Mrs. Gullibull sate down near her, she observed, as if the subject had been for some time in

her consideration—"I wish I only thought it was safe to invest in Railways, Mrs. Gullibull?—I am sure from what I hear, it is a much better per-centage than any government security, or even than an annuity, which I had some idea of purchasing."

"Nonsense!—they will not sell you an annuity worth purchasing, Miss Scurmucheon," said Mrs. Sparkleton, laughingly; "you look as young and fresh as if to last a thousand years yet."

"Why, how old do you think I look, Mrs. Sparkleton?" returned the lady addressed, with a glance that challenged Mrs. Sparkleton to dare to say what she probably thought.

"No, that is not fair—I may be supposed to know. Let this young lady conjecture, now," said Mrs. Sparkleton, turning to Charity Green. "She will give you the opinion most likely to be entertained by indifferent strangers."

"How old do you think I am, Miss. . .

I beg your pardon, but I forget your name?" said Miss Scurmucheon, with anxiety.

"Fifty-six, ma'am?" replied Charity, timidly, but making the farthest guess on the sunny side of the question her conscience permitted.

"Fifty-six!" repeated Miss Scurmucheon in blank horror.

"Impossible!—hi, hi, hi—the absurdity of the thing makes one—ha, ha, ha!" said Mrs. Sparkleton, unable to repress her enjoyment of the scene, and Mrs. Gullibull joined with great vehemence in the demonstration.

"Pray excuse—Charity always prides herself so on speaking what she thinks, as she calls it—ho, ho, ho! there's no gammon about Charity!" said Mrs. Gullibull.

"Fifty-six! the girl's a ——"

"It is quite ridiculous—fifty-six! hi, hi, hi," laughed Mrs. Sparkleton. "Put on your spectacles, Miss Green, if you have any!—no one could take Miss Scurmucheon to be thirty-five, that saw her."

This little incident for ever ruined Charity Green in the opinion of Miss Scurmucheon, who had begun to consider her as rather a sensible, quiet, unobtrusive sort of a nobody. On the contrary, Mrs. Sparkleton quite took her into favour, and essayed to enter into conversation with her. But that was not very easy: Charity Green had more ideas than words, and she had very few indeed of the former that were at all in Mrs. Sparkleton's way of thinking. Meanwhile, Mrs. Gullibull, feeling conscientiously that she had done her best to feed and entertain her guests, ventured to yield a little to her fatigue, and nodded in her arm-chair. Lady Fitzhauton sate disdainfully silent, feigning to be absorbed in the contents of one of her own old albums, wherein she took not the slightest interest. The elder ladies remained stern and immoveable in their chairs; the young ones giggled together in corners; Miss Scurmucheon resumed her prayer-book; and Mrs. Sparkleton left off attempting to produce the oddi-

ties of Charity Green. There was silence in the drawing-room for several minutes, though there were none but women in it.

Mrs. Sparkleton took up a flute from the table—Midas's flute, left there to show that he was habitually occupied in his mother's gorgeous withdrawing-room. And she played upon it with all the skill and execution which people bring to a first attempt, on such an instrument, and rather perseveringly. It served at least to demonstrate her appreciation of the social qualities of the ladies left awake. But she wearied in a few minutes of this, and laughingly observing, that Mrs. Gullibull's example was quite contagious, laid herself down on one of the rich satin sofas. Mrs. Gullibull would have been very sorry to waste its splendours so upon herself; but she nodded assent, and smiled in her sleep at whatever Mrs. Sparkleton might be doing; and even when she awoke, was highly pleased with the honour done to her furniture by her future daughter-in-law.

Mrs. Sparkleton covered her fine face with a delicate lace handkerchief, and either went to sleep or pretended to do so. The dowagers thereupon took heart of grace, and began to murmur in a low tone among themselves; the topic in discussion being the certainty of an approaching match between Mrs. Sparkleton and Mr. Midas Gullibull. The former had the happiness of finding that it was definitively settled, and that she was considered a wonderfully good match even for her wealthy bridegroom. The younger ladies speedily fell into the same vein, and discussed her appearance and dress, the very pattern of her lace, in agitated whispers. Some wondered whether it was polite to be so much at ease; whether people of rank were usually so in society, or whether she only did it there? Miss Fisher, however, did not believe that Midas would have her—grounding her belief on the fact, that Mrs. Sparkleton was a widow, and that nobody liked to marry a

widow. The aphorism was doubtful, but passed muster, all the assenters being maiden ladies.

As for Charity, she quietly rose and watered the flowers in the alcove, as was her custom at sunset. Perhaps she was induced to observe it, by finding that her own garb had fallen under notice of the young ladies. "Lor, dear, I wonder how you can like that nasty green colour?" said the eldest Miss Fisher. "And isn't green forsaken, too?—I'm sure *I* wouldn't choose it unless I were as green by nature as you are by name!"

Things went on in this way until Miss Scurmucheon solemnly closed her prayer-book, and restored it to her magnificent reticule, of which two young ladies, skilled in bead and worsted work, had respectfully requested a pattern. For want of something else to do, Miss Scurmucheon then turned her attention—to Mrs. Sparkleton's silent amusement—on Lady Fitzhauton.

"How poorly you do look to-day, my dear!" she exclaimed. "I hope you are quite well, Lady Fitzhauton?"

"Very well, ma'am, thank you."

"You can't be well, my dear, you speak so low: got a headache?"

"No, ma'am, thank you."

"She will have to thank her for one shortly," was Mrs. Sparkleton's aside.

"Have a little eau-de-cologne, and bathe your temples! I saw some on Miss Green's dressing-table. Indeed, I made free with a little—it is so very refreshing when one comes in from the sun."

"I have lots of it. I brought two cases from Paris," muttered Mrs. Gullibull, desirous to seem awake; and in some measure so in reality. "Do, Charity, go and bring Lady Fitzhauton some—not what we put in the finger-goblets—that isn't so good."

"I had rather have a cup of coffee, mamma—I dare say the gentlemen would come now—they must be tired," said Lady

Fitzhauton. "And I am sure I am tired of waiting for them."

"Do give your papa time over his wine—you know what fault he found last time—and it really looks as if one wanted to save it! Besides," continued Mrs. Gullibull, in what was meant to be a whisper, "I don't think the urns are quite cleaned yet, for Charity never thought of telling me how they must be tarnished, shut up in their bags in the pantry, and I only thought of them just as we came up from dinner."

There was another long pause, during which Mrs. Gullibull dropped fairly off to sleep, and Miss Scurmucheon failed in a renewed attempt to bathe the Lady Fitzhauton's temples with eau-de-cologne. This zeal was not altogether prompted by the motive she herself assigned—viz., a tender regard for her niece's health. She imagined it very possible, that the eau-de-cologne would be worth praising so intensely, that Mrs. Gullibull would ask leave to send her a case.

Miss Fisher regretted very much, and so did most of the other young ladies, that being Sunday they could not perform charades. She knew some that were really quite divine, and related one in which she had been a prominent actress, at a recent party, with a minute fidelity that made Mrs. Sparkleton yawn, although she was already to appearance fast asleep. In truth, she was striving to amuse herself with conjecturing what Mrs. Gullibull could be dreaming, for she muttered certain wayward fancies as she nodded in her chair. Perhaps, in imagination, she was scolding one of the maids, or deprecating some not imaginary pilfering on the part of one of the waiters. But Mrs. Sparkleton congratulated herself, singularly enough, on the fact that *she* was not Alderman Gullibull, and was therefore not compelled to repose by the side of his spouse at nights!

At last an arrival took place from the dining-room, before any summons was issued by the considerate and very drowsy hostess; before the paraphernalia of the Chinese

nymph made its appearance. It was not of sufficient importance to waken Mrs. Sparkleton, who yet seemed as if she were mesmerised, and could see with her feet. It was only the retired attorney, Mr. Bagshawe, who, however, was hailed as the first swallow of spring. He came in with a quick step, his pallid visage flushed, and with his characteristic expression of irritability and scorn in full play. But he was the only man in the room, and for a moment even Charity Green became the principal person in it, when this solitary male seated himself beside her. He was no very inviting companion either. He began to complain of his ill-health directly, declaring that he could not drink a couple of glasses without being maddened with a headache, which, in combination with the noise and nonsense talked below, had compelled him to make his retreat. He seemed unwilling to have it thought that any polite motive, such as preference for the society of the ladies, had induced him to quit that of the bottle.

"I thought you had been better lately, since the fine weather set in?" replied Charity, who certainly ought to have known, if constant information on the subject could warrant a decided opinion.

"No, no—it's quite a misapprehension—I only *thought* I was, too—but nobody cares about me, not even myself!—so it is no wonder people always conclude I am well, because they are so themselves," said Mr. Bagshawe. "But there's another thing; I really can't bear to see people flattering and bending before that Yorkshire Mammon of theirs, with his 'Ay, ay,' and 'everything-is-as-I-say it is,' in everything. I left him just now boasting that he had by far the finest pigs that ever were killed, and that he has two of the largest hams that ever were seen, out of one of his sties, at the temple they have built him—God knows where—somewhere in town! Did you ever read any geology, Miss Green? I suppose not, for you are always busy working samplers. I have, a little, for I

am quite sick of the earth, as it is at present. Well, I find there was once upon a time—long before the Bible, of course—an age of reptiles: but if ever there was an age of reptiles, physically, there is one now, morally! Such adulation, such homage! and to what? To a fortunate speculator!"

Charity gently essayed to turn this overflow of spleen upon a topic which usually relieved it—the state of his symptoms. "It must have annoyed you very much, sir; but I don't think you ought to put yourself so much about, as you are so subject to a palpitation of the heart."

"Not lately—since it got thoroughly ossified, it has left off that—unless when I have radishes for supper, with a little bit of pork, as I had the other night," replied Mr. Bagshawe; but the favourite topic was fairly introduced, and he was in the midst of a long account of his interview with an eminent physician, who refused to admit that he was labouring under disease of the heart—"to spare one's feelings, no doubt,

the humbug!—no doubt he would tell one's heirs fast enough, if one had one, to get into their good graces!"—when a fresh arrival interrupted him. Mrs. Sparkleton knew very well the measured elegance of the tramp, neither too quick nor too slow, neither eager nor lagging—but, in short, Lord Deville's. No one could form any conclusions from his gait, whether there was any particular attraction for him in the room, or not. Mrs. Sparkleton felt that, and continued to slumber while Lady Fitzhauton brightened up, and Mrs. Gullibull rubbing her eyes—awoke.

CHAPTER V.

Lord Deville smiled pleasantly as he entered. "Make much of me, ladies,—I have left the company of the most devoted worshippers of the jolly god in the world for yours," he said. "Fitzhauton would have come with me, but the alderman held him back by main force. I think he almost lost the skirts of his coat in the debate; so that, without compliment, *your ladyship* may conclude there is some very powerful magnet of attraction about you!"

"I don't think so," replied Lady Fitzhauton, missing the innuendo. "If I had ever any talisman, I have long since lost it."

"What kind of a man?" inquired Mrs.

Gullibull, with a degree of interest she did not usually apply to abstruse subjects.

"Not one of my sort, at all events," laughed Lord Deville. "Lady Fitzhauton has never lost me—therefore I am not the talisman in question. I wish I was. I know on whom I would use my magic virtues!" Undoubtedly his lordship glanced at Lady Fitzhauton, but with equal indubitability he moved to the window, and most attentively adjusted the blind so as to shut out the rays of the westering sun, which shone too hot and crimson on Mrs. Sparkleton's repose. He then joined the group, and with a quiet accidentalness of manner which rendered it impossible to suspect design, he resumed his old place beside Lady Fitzhauton.

"Well, I suppose I can send for them now?" said Mrs. Gullibull.

"Not quite yet—I heard Mr. Gullibull propose one round more, and Mr. Midas intended to give a health, in an appropriate speech—our sleeping beauty's yonder, I

believe," said Deville, with a carelessness that really charmed Lady Fitzhauton.

"Then your lordship ought to have staid to return thanks," said the latter, with a slight laugh, not unheard nor unheeded.

"I had no commission to that effect, and it was quite a family affair—the alderman meant to perform the office, and no doubt very eulogistically. But as I knew he could not come up to the merits of the original, I did not think myself bound to study the painted copy."

Lady Fitzhauton and Lord Deville were engaged in an easy but rather aside chat, when in about five minutes the next deserter from the bottle arrived. This was Mr. Twittlewit. He seemed in high spirits, and triumphantly took possession of the conversation, by announcing that he had just so utterly floored Sir John Foghie in an argument, that the baronet could never presume to open his lips again on the same subject. To escape the infliction of the

whole affair—arguments and rejoinders in extension—Lord Deville introduced a still more interesting topic. "We were talking about literary matters—pray do you ever read novels, Mr. Twittlewit?"

"No, my lord, I make them!—as the quack doctor said, when they wanted him to take some of his own pills."

"I own it would be rather hard to swallow one's own compounds of the sort," said his lordship, in the same vein. "Well, I acquit you. But you are a judge in everything—were you at the new comedy last night?"

"Comedy!—I thought it was a tragedy?" replied the critic.

"All I know is—they call it a 'comedy' in the bills," said Deville.

"Well, I went to sleep in the middle of the first act, so I can't say," returned the critic.

"Decided success, was it not?" persisted the querist.

"Oh, it is so in the playbills, no doubt—brilliant, unparalleled!"

"Well but now—it was very good, was it not?"

"Very *personal*—very personal indeed!" said Twittlewit; "takes off all his intimate friends most unmercifully."

"Modern literary people in society seem to enter it merely for the sake of writing an article or a libel on it—so it is no wonder," said Deville, drily. "But, Mr. Twittlewit, *Quis tulerit Gracchos de seditione querentes?*"

"O, my lord, we should never quote Latin before ladies!" ejaculated Mr. Twittlewit.

"Still less before scholars," replied his lordship. "But come, now, do acknowledge —people were delighted with the thing? They must have been."

"Why you see, my lord, the author is a friend of mine, and of course I am prejudiced—"

"*Not* against him? And we are not envious; you can say what you like in his favour," continued the tormentor.

"Well, prejudice apart, I do not think

that Froth's comedy is worthy of his reputation. And yet in another sense I do, for his reputation is in my opinion a mere bubble."

"Why, who was it clapped, then?—I hear that the house shook again!"

"There are such things as *claqueurs*—people hired to be pleased, your lordship knows."

"Ay, and in more than playhouses," observed Deville. "But I suppose Froth has been in the sky ever since?"

"He *says* nothing—but looks as solemn as if he were going to burst," replied the friend, "and sometimes he casts a melancholy look upward, as if asking assistance from Heaven to bear such a weight of glory!"

"Well, but he is a clever fellow—he is considered so—you consider him so at all events, don't you?" continued Deville, quietly amused.

"Clever!—not quite a Shakspeare, perhaps."

"Nobody suspects him of being so; but

now do give us your candid opinion on this tragedy, or comedy, or whatever it is, for authors, like women, are the best judges of one another, as they are the severest!"

"To speak candidly, then—the whole thing is below contempt!" exclaimed the friendly critic. "The characters are mere daubs, the language absurd—such as was never spoken in any civilized society since the world began! And indeed, as a really great writer for the stage once remarked on a similar production—whatever is good is not original, and whatever is original is not good."

"I hope, Mr. Twittlewit, you will never give my character *candidly*," said Lady Fitzhauton, rather astonished at this eulogium.

"Excuse me, madam, but as Pope says,

'Most women have no character at all.'

"And as Pope did *not* say," thought the sleeping Mrs. Sparkleton, "many men have characters they would be very glad to be rid of."

"Good!—But we may at least congratulate you on your own success, without fear of contradiction?" said Lord Deville.

"Congratulate me!—on what?—Success!—I do not understand your lordship!" replied Twittlewit, rejoiced beyond measure that the conversation had at last come round to this interesting topic.

"The success of your novel."

"Ah, true, I had forgotten it. The glories of life do not repay us for its bitternesses!" sighed the faithful imitator of Childe Harold.

"Great geniuses are always wretched—therefore I am glad I am none," said Lord Deville.

"But I should think there is no very horrid secret in your bosom, Mr. Twittlewit?" snarled Bagshawe, smiling, or at least showing his teeth. "How you start, sir! Pray did you ever have a Greek slave that was killed by the sultan in a fit of jealousy?"

"Sir!" exclaimed Twittlewit; but the sir made no farther reply; and in this strain

the conversation continued for some time. Mrs. Gullibull was meanwhile watching with intense anxiety the process of illumining the vast chandelier which hung from her drawing-room ceiling, and which was lighted on this occasion for the first time. A tremendous glare of light, which pained the eyes of all beneath its influence, was soon produced, and Mrs. Gullibull's heart sung within her for joy and triumph. The famous urns made their appearance, and the trays of tea, coffee, and cakes, in order due. But it was not until Mrs. Sparkleton recognised Lord Fitzhauton's voice on the stairs, that she began to think it worth while to seem alive. She was well aware that her figure showed to great advantage reclining; and as she was not at first observed, she had the additional satisfaction of hearing Fitzhauton inquire, with evident anxiety, "Where is Mrs. Sparkleton?" almost immediately after he had entered. Midas was with him. "Hush!" said Mrs. Gullibull, playfully, "Hush, or you will

wake the poor dear lady, and we have had some trouble to get her to sleep."

Midas had done justice to his father's wine, perhaps purposely to give him courage, for he very rarely trusted himself to so uncalculating a keeper. "Nonsense, mother! I'll wake her," he said; and stole towards the couch on tiptoe.

"What are you going to do?" said Lord Fitzhauton, who followed instantly, quite close upon him.

"To earn a pair of gloves! Don't spoil the fun, my dear fellow," replied Midas.

"You are mad, surely! Mrs. Sparkleton is not accustomed to such pleasantries, and I will not suffer you to offend her," said Fitzhauton, stepping between the wooer and his object. "Mrs. Sparkleton, shall I hand you to your seat?"

An excellently well-acted scene followed. Mrs. Sparkleton started, opened her beautiful eyes, gave a sweet smile on discovering who had wakened her, declared she had no idea she was asleep, and rising, wondered

how long she had been so. "Dear me! how this light dazzles one—I must really acclimatise myself a little in the shade," concluded the proper allowance of exclamation, and Mrs. Sparkleton moved towards one of the windows, between whose massive draperies shone a bright moonlight.

"I shall get into your warm place then," said the judicious Midas, throwing himself on the relinquished sofa, while Lord Fitzhauton, perceiving that Mrs. Sparkleton had inadvertently let her handkerchief fall, picked it up and followed her with it.

"What a fine moonlight, and a pretty alcove of flowers—and the river beyond. It is quite a landscape. It reminds me a little of Chantilly," said Mrs. Sparkleton.

"We were happier then!" said Fitzhauton, folding his arms, leaning back, and gazing with visible tenderness at the lady.

"Yes—I had then one true friend in the world! Colonel Sparkleton was— alive. And what delightful rides we had!—Do you remember our races, and how poor

Sparkleton used to call himself the winning post?"

"Don't talk of him!—I hate to talk of dead people," said Fitzhauton.

"It is my only comfort to remember him! —You know I *can* have none other now! How this dreadful chandelier—I really think it is lighted with gas—hurts one's eyes! It makes mine water. Let us talk of something else."

Of something else they talked, and in tones that gradually sunk almost into a murmur; of the landscape, of Chantilly, of the company present, no doubt—until Mrs. Gullibull resolutely declared she would wait no longer for the company below. She had already sent for the gentlemen twice, and they paid no attention. She had therefore decided on commencing tea immediately. Mrs. Sparkleton and Lord Fitzhauton obeyed the first call to the table, the former eulogising the splendour of the light which, she said, almost dazzled her eyes out.

Not satisfied with this success, Mrs.

Gullibull called attention to her tea equipage, the patterns on which were not exactly in consonance with English or modern notions of propriety. But the porcelain was from Sèvres and the urns were after the antique, and these facts satisfactorily accounted for the naked nymphs on the coffee cups and the loves of the gods on the urns. Mrs. Gullibull was justly proud of her urns; they were of solid silver, and most richly wrought. It is sufficient to say, as she said, that the Sèvres porcelain was a prize set, to eulogise that: but it must be allowed she had rather an odd way of calling attention to the latter subject. "Well, now, Lord Deville, can you believe that those ancients used to bury their dead bodies in such things as these urns of mine?"

"In silver tea-urns? Oh, certainly not," said his lordship, eyeing Mrs. Sparkleton attentively, who looked flushed, and a little angry, and very much pleased, after her aside conversation.

"I never use an urn on that account—

the thought is quite disgusting," said Mrs. Sparkleton. "But one has really a fine view from your house, Mrs. Gullibull, when one can't see the market gardens, and things of that kind, directly below."

"Most things look pretty well on the surface, ma'am," said the retired attorney. "Eve's apple did; but it ate confoundedly bitter."

"I don't believe that Eve stole the apple!" said Lady Fitzhauton, with sudden and apparently unnecessary vehemence. "I believe it was Adam, and that he laid the blame on her out of sheer cowardice and hatred of his wife!"

"My dear child, have you read your Bible?" ejaculated Miss Scurmucheon, horror-stricken. "Genesis—I forget the exact chapter and verse; but I'll find them both in a moment, if you have such a thing as a Bible in the house, Mrs. Gullibull?"

"Why, that's the only thing we haven't got yet—I mean, a library—we must have

one, though: of course we have a Bible at church," replied Mrs. Gullibull.

"Nonsense, aunt, she don't believe any such thing; she don't believe what she says; so don't let us have a bore about that!" interposed Fitzhauton.

"*She* does though, and most thoroughly. —Am I never to have an opinion of my own on any subject?" retorted the wife. "Although I believe there *are* some wicked women a good deal worse than the men!"

"The whole affair happened so long ago, that in my opinion, it is not worth disputing about," said Mrs. Sparkleton, biting her lip. "Last night's opera will more repay the trouble. You were there, my lord; what did you think of it?"

No wonder Fitzhauton turned with delight from the testy wife to the amiable friend. But Mrs. Gullibull, with the usual sagacity of a mother-in-law, hastened to widen the breach, by taking her daughter's side in it.

"Oh, come! everyone must allow the men are almost always in the wrong. What can a woman want but the good of her husband and family?" she observed. "And talk of crocodiles!—men beat them hollow. There's the poor cook, at Mrs. Savoury's, on the heath; what do you think she told me? I had it from Mrs. Savoury's own lips. Well, if that poor girl had not been saving, and saving, and furnishing two rooms for her sweetheart—Mr. Mann's gardener, at Fulham, you know, who was to marry her. And lo and behold, as soon as she had everything done up quite nice,—a carpet little worse than new, three chairs, and cups and saucers painted so tasty, (for I saw one of them,) with grapes as big as the men gathering them—what does he do but go and marry another girl, and make her a present of all poor cookey's savings. Oh, you wretches, my lord!—Ha, ha, ha!—but one can't help laughing to think how poor cookey was done!"

All the young ladies tittered, and Miss

Fisher spiritedly observed, "I am sure he should not have served me so!" Lord Deville laughed with more heartiness than was usual with him, and Fitzhauton frowned and pouted his moustache.

"What is that?" said Mrs. Sparkleton, after an instant's intense silence.

"I declare it is Midas snoring!—he is fast asleep, and no mistake," said his mother, congratulatingly. "Poor fellow, we'll let him sleep on. I dare say he is tired enough, for he was all yesterday at the warehouse, seeing them measure I don't know how many quarters of red Stettin."

Fortunately at this moment the rest of the company arrived from the dining-room, and in the general bustle Midas's slumbers, and consequent music, were brought to an end.

CHAPTER VI.

THIS reinforcement entered a little tumultuously; its personages were all talking together, in raised tones, and with a good deal of gesticulation. They were discussing—let me remember what they were discussing? The propriety of a man's marrying two sisters, not together, but in succession. As this topic involved arguments of a theological character, in which all the parties were equally ignorant, but on which they mostly relied for support, it was a very violent affair. Besides, they had all had quite as much to drink as was consistent with a lucid exercise of their faculties. Some of them perhaps a little more. Mr.

Humson, for one, was a man that never shrunk from his duty on such occasions. Nevertheless, he was almost the only person of the company, and it included the Rev. Gilbart Ruddimac, who took a sensible view of the controversy. "Ay, ay," he said, "Ay, ay, Mr. Gullibull, that may be all very fine—very good indeed. People may be damned for marrying their wives' sisters: what is that to you or me? We don't intend to do it, eh? Unless that Miss Scurmucheon (*in a whisper*) is yours, and I see you are very sweet upon one another, eh? So if any one likes to be damned—in a land of liberty like this—I say, let them, and be d—d'd. You know what the dumb letters mean, my boy?"

"Well, I'm sure I don't care; only Ruddimac talks such nonsense! One can't make head or tail of him and his Puseyism—though, by gar, I think he took my side of the question, didn't he?"

"Of course he did: he was against the lawfulness; so were you—I want to sit near

that pretty woman that was below at dinner. What's her name? Mrs. Spark—Spark—Spark something?" replied Mr. Humson, rather abruptly signifying his sovereign pleasure.

"Take care she don't *spark* you, old fellow!—Isn't she a beauty?—My son, Midas, is going to have her, so don't come any of your specs. in that direction! You see she's talking with my daughter's good man—but I'll bet any money, if you seat yourself where she can get at you, she will get round to you, by hook or by crook!"

And lo it befel so! An old lady of the company was seated at an inconvenient distance from the tea-table; Mrs. Sparkleton observed it, and also that a chair was vacant near the great man, on the opposite side. In a moment she had resigned her chair, and occupied the other—though her own was very nicely placed between Lord Fitzhauton and Midas Gullibull—though the latter had assured her upon his honour that when

asleep on the recent occasion he was dreaming of her!

Humson was a very different man after dinner, and among the ladies, than before, or when domineering over the rougher sex. In fact, whenever not contradicted or contravened in any manner, he was the pink of bonhommie and politesse—in his way. He was certainly the best-natured king in the world, when the homage due was suitably rendered; he could forget his greatness, he could relax, he could be "Old King Cole" himself. Like all prosperous men, with broadset shoulders, jolly persons, and oily large eyes, he was a great admirer of the ladies, in general. But Mrs. Sparkleton was particularly beautiful, and had the most fascinating manners. The pride of the plebeian was flattered by the attentions of a woman of such undoubted aristocracy; so that they were prepared to coalesce in opinion, as easily and naturally as two globules of quicksilver flow into each other.

It is certain at least that Mrs. Sparkleton changed hers at a moment's warning, purely to oblige Mr. Humson. She entertained a very strong distaste to the idea of marriage with a deceased wife's sister, and whenever she heard it mentioned always expressed her disapprobation. She did not know why, and never inquired; perhaps it was because the only one of her sisters, who was married, had a most disagreeable, remonstrating sort of a husband, who took upon him at times to point out to her that she was living too extravagantly. She knew, or thought she knew, that he wanted her to starve herself and leave her money to his brats—if ever he should have any. But Mr. Humson had only to say—"Now, now—what do *you* think? I always like to hear the ladies' opinion on this subject; it is their business a great deal more than ours. I am going to vote for the Bill—am I not right? Now, come, am I not right?"

And Mrs. Sparkleton answered—"*Quite right!* I only wonder people dispute it.'

"Quite right, sir, undoubtedly," ejaculated Miss Scurmucheon, turning furiously from the arguments with which the Reverend Gilbart Ruddimac was trying to bring her over to his opinion, as well as he could, with the aid of three bottles of port, and a proportionate allowance of dinner wines. "Who ever heard of such a thing? A clergyman of the Church of England, as I understand, preaching to me the Romish doctrine of the dispensative power of the church, and urging that in consequence——"

"Pho, pho—it matters nothing about the church! We parliament-men only want to put a stop to a system of—you'll excuse me, ladies—concubinage and bastardy, which will go on just the same, whether we legalise them or not," interrupted Humson.

"Lots of jolly fellows will be much obliged to you to legalise them, governor!" said Lawless, who was one of a select few that had done too much justice to the alderman's wines.

"What do you think, Mrs Sparkleton?

Hear Mrs. Sparkleton. Hear, hear! We will have her judgment, and it shall be decisive," exclaimed Humson.

"I think as Mr. Humson does; that is enough; I am certain to be right," said Mrs. Sparkleton, playfully. If any one else had asked her opinion on such a subject she would have been greatly and reasonably offended; but one forgives kings everything, except ceasing to be so.

"Bravo, Humson!—that *is* a testimonial!" said the familiar impudence of Lawless.

"Mrs. Sparkleton may, if she likes, abandon the most sacred right of a Protestant Christian, the right of private judgment," said Miss Scurmucheon, who was not pleased to find a person whom in secret she much disliked, placed in such authority by the dispenser of wealth. "But for my own part ——"

"But, my dear Miss Scurmucheon," interrupted the Scotch Puseyite divine, affectionately putting his hand on Miss Scur-

mucheon's lean, bejewelled fingers, which reposed on the elbow of her chair, in the warmth of pastoral exhortation; "but, my dear Miss Scurmucheon ——"

"None of that! that's not fair—we'll have nothing *ad captandum*. I haven't squeezed my lady's hand to get the truth out of her: we'll have none of that!" said Humson, laughing with his loud, hearty, jolly, John Bull peal. After all, Humson was an honest fellow, in everything but railroads!

"I am sure I don't wish," said the Reverend Gilbart, hurriedly withdrawing his hand.

"I am sure I did not observe," said Miss Scurmucheon, hurriedly withdrawing hers.

"Quite an accident—quite an accident—as Serjeant Pratie said the other day, at the Duke of Dutchland's dinner to the judges, when, in the excess of his loyalty, he gave us the Royal Family, 'including those unborn,'" replied the monarch; "but don't let us interrupt. Mrs. Sparkleton and I can amuse ourselves."

"Do you like the Duke of Dutchland?" said Mrs. Sparkleton, thinking, however, of something else.

"He gives capital dinners. I like that."

"Do you think so, sir?" said Twittlewit. "Upon my word, I think they are not good at all."

Twittlewit had dined once at the Duke of Dutchland's, and thus ungratefully insinuated that he was a constant guest at his grace's table.

"Then all I can say, sir, is—you are no judge," replied Mr. Humson. "But, now, I'll wager any money, Mrs. Sparkleton, you don't care a bodle what I think of the duke or of anybody else but yourself; now, be candid, confess—isn't that the truth?"

"I would far rather know your opinion on what is the best thing to do with money, at this particular time?" replied Mrs. Sparkleton, so earnestly and implicitly that the monarch himself was moved to pity.

"Well, then, now, I'll give you a little sincere advice; I know you won't take it;

but I'll tell you what to do with your money. Keep it! *Keep money when you have got it.* Don't lay it out on things you understand nothing about, you fine ladies. Leave railways alone, and invest in poodles, if you must invest at all."

"Now that is very unkind of you, Mr. Humson. It is very well known that the Duchess of B—— made two hundred thousand pounds by a fortunate speculation," said Mrs. Sparkleton, disappointedly.

"But we have been at it too long; we have nearly milked the cow dry, you know," replied the king. "If you like, I'll do something for you in another way. I shall take to mines shortly—rails wont last much longer. You shall have as many shares in a Welsh mine I have my eye upon as you like."

"But I don't like mines, they are such tedious things. I can't wait till things are dug up," said Mrs. Sparkleton.

"Why don't you go to California, then? You need only take a sieve and a rake

there. But, my dear lady, as that sly old fox says yonder, I don't intend to dig either. We take the thing up, allot one another shares, sell at premium, and leave plodding people to do the work—people that only want the per centage of their money—that don't want their money ever again."

"But I have bought in railways—I am in your railway," said Mrs. Sparkleton, warmly.

"You could not be in a better; only you should sell out again as soon as you can; quotations may be higher, certainly; but delays are dangerous!"

"Oh, I shall wait till I can double my money; Alderman Gullibull says that will be sure to happen in a few months."

"There is nothing sure but death and quarter-day! Yes; Gullibull ought to know—he is pretty deeply in," replied the oracle.

"Well, indeed, I should be happy to join in some little speculation myself," here interposed Miss Scurmucheon, an attentive

listener so far. "It must be a great deal better than reduced consols, and I could sell out of them to-morrow."

"Well, you ladies will have your own way," said Mr. Humson. "But, mind, if anything happens, don't come squalling after me, and abusing me like a pick-pocket. I warn you—I am only the pilot—and the moment I see the rocks I shall jump overboard and save myself, perish who will. But I am a little surprised what an evangelical lady like you, Miss Scur-mucheon, can want with money—more money than you have. The gospel preaches poverty—that's the sort of thing for you religious people."

"The more money we have, the more power we have of doing good, Mr. Humson."

"To ourselves—Ha! ha! ha!—that's the chief religion among us, at present. Well, Mrs. Sparkleton, if you are really in the market, and will call on me to-morrow, I will enlighten you to the best of my experience. But, at present, Gullibull's

wine has played the devil with my calculating machine, and I declare I know no more than the babe unborn how York and Midlands' stand. Then, besides, you are in for our new junction branch: look alive, else you will get yourself into a hobble."

"I'll be sure to call and consult with you to-morrow. I may come to your own house, I suppose?" said Mrs. Sparkleton, eagerly.

"The doors will fly open of their own accord," replied the gallant monarch.

"And I'll accompany Mrs. Sparkleton, if she will permit me," said Miss Scurmucheon. "Of course it would be much the best to have an opinion from the fountain-head."

"No; you are evangelical; you will not like your reception. I shall receive you in my Lola Montes room, as we call it; you mustn't come." Mrs. Humson is out of town, and Mrs. Sparkleton and I will eat our bread and butter together."

"I was not aware," said Mrs. Sparkleton,

smiling. "I'll come some time when she is in town; but meanwhile I am conceded the privilege of the entrée? I am a peeress of your kingdom: I may come when I like?"

"The oftener the better; I like to see pretty things of every sort, but pretty women the most," replied the gallant director; and Mrs. Sparkleton was herself astonished to remember that at the very time this bread and butter consultation should have taken place she had agreed to let Lord Fitzhauton accompany her on a favourite ride of hers to Willesden. We mean, she had accidentally mentioned that she meant to resume horse exercise, (which she had neglected since she left Paris,) and commence with a ride in that direction on the following day; and Fitzhauton immediately discovered that he had a similar intention.

"But, evangelism apart, I do wonder how people can be so very eager after money," said Mr. Bagshawe, somewhat

abruptly, in the pause that ensued. "What is the use of money?—you cannot get anything you want with it."

"Pho! you can get everything; and without it, nothing, sir," returned the potent millionnaire. "With all that fine talk, now, I know very well you would be glad if I would put you in the way to make five hundred *pund?* Wouldn't you, eh? There's nothing like money! What is it you can't have for money?"

"You can't make a woman love you—you cannot have her heart for money," said the attorney, in a strangely bitter and snappish tone.

"Tut, tut, man! you can have herself, and if her heart isn't in the bargain, I wish them joy that get it, that's all," returned Mr. Humson. "So, now, Mrs. Sparkleton, tell me what you have got into, and I'll tell you what chance you have of getting out."

Mrs. Sparkleton continued absorbed in the mysteries of railway scrip and in ex-

tracting oracles; and before the conversation was finished, the pleased monarch had "put her up," as he phrased it, to a most excellent "spec." in a secret line, in projection, if she only took care to sell out before a Committee of the House had decided on its merits.

Lord Deville meanwhile sate very quiet, and remarkably silent, observing; insomuch that Lord Fitzhauton rallied him on the circumstance. "What is the matter, Deville?—you are drooping your branches to-night."

"It is my willow-garland—you see how I am deserted," replied his lordship, smiling, and managing his countenance and voice so well as to make his fellow-peer imagine he *was* a little piqued at Mrs. Sparkleton's neglect of him. Fitzhauton laughed scornfully and triumphantly, while he glanced at Mr. Humson, perhaps rejoicing inwardly in the direction taken by his friend's alarms.

"You do not wrong me, my Lord Fitzhauton, but you *think* you do," thought

Deville; "that is enough: retaliation is justice."

"Look how Mrs. Sparkleton is talking Mr. Humson up," said Lady Fitzhauton to Lord Deville, in a low tone. "What eyes she has! what very wicked eyes, with every one. If I were a man, I should hate her!"

"You would have reason," replied Deville. "Mr. Humson, you are making us all jealous here—you are absorbing Mrs. Sparkleton."

"I am teaching her her A, B, C! I am teaching her how to understand the share list. She is a great speculator, and knows nothing about fractions!" laughed the monarch.

"I am sure I think *I* ought to be jealous," said Mrs. Gullibull, facetiously; "for just see how Miss Scurmucheon is talking up my lord and master! I'll thank you for a bit of muffin, my lord—no; I mean, one of you waiters bring it me."

"Ay, ay; Miss Scurmucheon and I are

very sweet on each other, but sugar's down in the market," said the alderman, with a wink. "It's time for us both to sell out—too late in the day to keep a tight hold—ha! ha! ha!"

"Well, sugar *is* uncommon cheap," philosophized Mrs. Gullibull; "I can recollect when I was a young woman, when we lived in Fagg-lane—but it's all pulled down now—however, that's neither here nor there—as I was saying, sugar—the best loaf—was ——"

"I made a nice thing by the rise last season, Gullibull," interrupted Lawless. "Blackie wouldn't work, you know, except where he was forced, so I bought in Brazils to the tune of—what do you think, Gullibull?"

"I hope you didn't, sir; I hope, as a Christian, you did not, sir!" interrupted Miss Scurmucheon.

"I didn't buy as a Christian, ma'am; I bought as a man that wanted to turn his penny—honestly, if he could," replied Law-

less. "But turn it I did; and what do you think I made?"

"I don't want to know, sir; the horrible traffic in human beings which continues to disgrace humanity ——"

"How much did you make, Lawless?" interrupted Gullibull. Midas also listened to the reply with great anxiety.

"Three thousand pounds, at a slap, without ever putting a stiver down," replied the intrepid Lawless, willing to excite admiration and envy.

"Pho! I've often made that on a shipload of wheat; and, if all go well, I shall make it a hundred times over, soon!" returned the alderman, contemptuously. Lawless smiled, with his wide, coarse mouth, and, like an ill-bred wretch, as he was, produced a gold tooth-pick, and performed the service to which it was destined, quite leisurely, before the company.

"Well, I don't know," resumed Mrs. Gullibull, "I have been a wife these thirty years—let me see, we were married, John,

the year Bonyparty came from Elba! and I don't think I was ever jealous from that day to this."

"Perhaps you may have had cause, though, ma'am," simpered the witty Twittlewit.

"I don't think it, nor ever gave any,' returned this truly British wife.

"What, never once assailed in all that time?—I wish I had been a young man in those days, Mrs. Gullibull!" said Twittlewit.

"I should like to see the man that had the impudence!" returned Mrs. Gullibull, with vehemence. "I'd soon let him see on what side his bread was buttered and sanded too! I think there's always something wrong about the woman, something *treacly* that encourages the men, when they come that sort of thing. There was never anything of the kind about me, thank goodness! My worst enemy couldn't say it."

"O, mamma, what nonsense! Nobody I'm sure's accusing you," said her daughter.

"If I had a jealous wife, I tell you what I would do," subjoined Twittlewit, energeti-

cally. "I would stop at our club half the night for a whole season!"

"Ay, ay, that would be just the thing; she could *calculate* on your return! Other people would be more attentive,—not so much engaged at their clubs," said Mr. Humson.

"Fie, fie!" said Miss Scurmucheon.

"Oh, pray, Mr. Humson, don't talk so," said Mrs. Gullibull, laughing. "If a man cannot trust in the wife of his bosom, in whom can he?"

"In his attorney!" said Mr. Bagshawe, very shortly and snappishly.

"His attorney!—Lord bless us!—unless he was such a one as you are, Mr. Bagshawe!" returned Mrs. Gullibull, clasping both hands, and raising them in wonder.

"I am not one now, ma'am; I never give advice, you know; you have tried me yourself," replied Mr. Bagshawe.

"Well, come, what do ye all say on this subject? Shall we have a little music?" interposed Alderman Gullibull. "There

are lots of ladies of us; come, let's have a turn or two on the piano."

"Mr. Gullibull! surely you forget it is Sunday!" said Miss Scurmucheon.

"Not I, Miss, for it is the only day of the week when I have any chance of hearing a little music, except the organs in the street! Ann used always to do over her week's lessons for me on the Sunday," returned the alderman. "What sin can there be in a little music? I don't mean polkas and things of that sort—but an Irish melody, or Auld Lang Syne; or anything of *that* sort. Do you see any sin in it, Mr. Ruddimac?"

The Reverend Gilbart immediately raised himself in his chair, with an evident intention of delivering his opinion at some length. "Now, my dear Miss Scurmucheon," he said, with his long Scotch drawl, "be*leeve* me, there can be no more sin in a little harmless diversion of the kind, than ——"

"Sir, I am aware of the popish and

tractarian doctrine on the subject; but I for one, ——"

"What's your opinion, Humson?" said the alderman, overpowering Miss Scurmucheon's scruples, or at least the expression of them, by superior weight of metal in his voice.

"Who? mine?—I would far rather hear a little music any day than a scolding wife!" was the reply. "Come, Mrs. Sparkleton, you'll begin, and then they'll think it all right to follow. You're the fashion, and so am I, so we have only to set it."

"Yes, Maggie Lauder, Maggie Lauder shall begin," said the alderman, seizing his fair guest in a tenacious grasp. But she needed no violence. She had great liberality of sentiment on most subjects, picked we don't exactly know where, but believe it was in French novels; besides, what Humson approved, and Miss Scurmucheon disapproved, must have pleased her. "But mind, I yield to force—I am not the

temptress," she said, suffering herself to be led to the piano. "Not that I am at all puritanical in my opinions. In Paris, we used to attend mass in Nôtre Dame, every morning, and the Opera every evening: and if it is not considered a sin at Putney to hear a little music on a Sunday,—I am not theologian enough to decide whether it is or not."

CHAPTER VII.

THE young ladies arose like a startled covey of partridges, and after a short flutter, unanimously veered their flight towards the piano. Mr. Hymson was meanwhile engaged in his quick and bustling manner, in arranging music and music stool, and the Reverend Gilbart continued to instil his popish doctrines concerning a cheerful observance of the sabbath, into the ears of Miss Scurmucheon, which gradually inclined to his discourse. Miss Scurmucheon saw the unrivalled whiteness and neatness of the reverend gentleman's cravat; she had somehow gathered that he had already a very decent cure, and a prospect of a much better

one from an influential nobleman. All the Scotch are of good families: he was a bachelor: he sermonized, but he called her his "dear Miss Scurmucheon," at the commencement of every paragraph of his harangues, instead of "his dear brethren:" —a single life is a lonely one; she was calmed, and lent her best attention to one of the longest-winded orations ever addressed to a single individual.

No one else paid any attention to the argument; it was already practically decided. Mrs. Sparkleton seated herself at the instrument, Mr. Humson officiating as leaf-turner, not always at the exactly proper point, but with unremitting zeal, and the young ladies watched with profound scrutiny, the first operation of those slender, brilliantly ringed fingers. They were soon satisfied. Mrs. Sparkleton was a dazzling player; she could rattle over as many notes as Herz or Czerny, in any given time. It was like playing on lightning, such an infinite velocity of sounds streamed from

her touch, the moment she began, to the moment she ceased, having performed one of the most difficult and rapid inventions of the former master. No young lady felt the courage to venture, after such a display: some couldn't play unless their own music was before them; some never played on a Sunday; some would rather not; some would far rather hear Mrs. Sparkleton play, "it was quite a treat."

Unfortunately for the company, alderman Gullibull had a fancy that he could sing!—sing without time, tune, or voice, for he dispensed with all these elements in his musical exercitations. It was the only accomplishment on which he greatly prided himself. "Hang it, since they are all so frightened—here's me that never learned a note of music in my life—I'll pitch you a stave!" he exclaimed. 'Come, Humson, I know you don't care for this grand new-fangled stuff, any more than I do. What say you? Shall I give Auld Lang Syne, in a plain English way?"

"Just what ye like, Mr. Gullibull, but ye'll not persuade me ye'll sing better than Mrs. Sparkleton plays," returned the dictator.

"She shall play, too; you'll play the tune with me, won't you, Maggie?—none of your confounded accompaniments, but the plain tune to my voice."

Mrs. Sparkleton remembered her achievements in Maggie Lauder, smiled, shook her head, but assented.

"Go ahead, Gullibull, I'll help you in the chorus—the coalbox!" said Lawless, thrusting himself forward,. close behind Mrs. Sparkleton, and gazing downward with a satyr's eye at her beautifully formed neck and shoulders. Mrs. Sparkleton shuddered, for she almost felt his hot winy breath, and looked round for Lord Fitzhauton.

"Lord Fitzhauton! have you deserted me, then?" her glance seemed to say. In a moment he was beside her.

"We are all as planets to their sun—

however distant, never out of its attraction," said Lord Deville, deliberately crossing one knee on the other, like a man that has made up his mind to endure.

We were wrong when we said that Alderman Gullibull had no voice; he had a very bad one. But he was an enthusiast in his art. To see him with his eye-glass stuck to his eye, bending almost close to the book, flushed crimson in the face, and bawling as loud as human lungs can bawl unrent, one would have said he was a first-rate amateur. Out of tune almost continually, and exposed by the verbatim accompaniment he exacted from Mrs. Sparkleton, still he perseveringly droned through all the numerous verses of the song, seconded not unfrequently by the harsh grating roar of Lawless's voice, and in the choruses by the jovial attempts of Humson, and some faint thread-like sounds from the young ladies.

"What a horrid thing it is that father will sing, when he can't any more than an

old tom-cat !" ejaculated Midas to his next neighbour, Mr. Twittlewit. "Did you ever hear such a noise?"

"Yes, you may often hear it, when they are tuning all the instruments at once, in an orchestra," replied Twittlewit.

"We may as well talk a little—I wanted to speak on a subject," continued Midas, in a confidential tone. "As you are such a fine writer, I should be much obliged to you, if you will draw up my soap bill for me."

"I draw up your soap bill, sir!—I am not a lawyer, nor a man of business of any sort."

"Oh, you needn't mind about that—I only want it to be drawn up in style! I have my own rude draft of it in my pocket. If you don't care about father's horrid screeching, (I wonder he can make such a fool of himself, at his age!) I'll just read it to you, and then a day or two spent together, will finish us. Whereas ——"

"I tell you—I assure you upon my

honour—I understand nothing about it!" ejaculated the victim.

"Oh, you'll understand it quick enough," said Midas, drawing a packet of seven or eight closely written folio sheets from his pocket. "Whereas, the price of soap has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished ——"

"Midas, I don't think you are so attentive as you ought to be, to Mrs. Sparkleton, leaving her in that mob alone!" said Lady Fitzhauton.

"Come, we'll both go, or I shall fall asleep; your father makes such a psalm tune of it," said Mrs. Gullibull.

"Be so good as to look over this paper then, till I come back," said Midas, delivering his precious papers to the lifeless hands of Mr. Twittlewit, and following his mother's serpentine waddle to the piano.

Lady Fitzhauton and Lord Deville became for a short period isolated. "Dear Lady Fitzhauton!" he whispered, "I pity you!—I see that you suffer! Would to

Heaven that the sacrifice of my existence could restore you to peace of mind."

"Dear me, Lord Deville! what should make you think I suffer?—I'm sure I don't," replied Lady Fitzhauton.

"You may deceive others, but not me, with that assumed gaiety and sprightliness of manner; but indeed—though a man is not so severe a judge in such matters as a lady—I must concede, that I think Mrs. Sparkleton's manner *is* rather reprehensible."

"I don't, then—I don't see anything unusual in it! She always goes on as if she were courting every man she comes near! But I know how it is; in spite of all you say, you are desperately in love with her, and quite jealous because you see how she flirts with people."

"I am jealous, you think, of Lord Fitzhauton?—And so I am, in one sense—and with regard to one woman!"

"Pho, nonsense, I wish you wouldn't talk so; I shall be obliged to cut your

acquaintance, if you do. Fitzhauton, indeed!"

"Oh, yes, it is all nothing, I am aware," continued his lordship. "Nothing,—as fashionable morals run!"

"I have a good mind to quarrel with her, so that she might never come to our house again! She annoys me so!" exclaimed Lady Fitzhauton, pretty fiercely, for a creature of so soft a mould.

"*Miss Scurmucheon* is certainly not a very agreeable companion. She is of a prying disposition," said the Viscount. "But I was going to observe—if you will permit me,—I will call to-morrow to pay my respects, and see the curious Japan trays, Mrs. Gullibull says she presented you the other day. I am a great virtuoso."

"I shall be at home till it is time to go to the park," replied Lady Fitzhauton. "Fitzhauton is always out of a morning, but he'll stay in, I suppose, if he thinks you are coming."

"Pray, don't ask him—my coming is

quite uncertain—I will take my chance whether I find any one in or not," said Lord Deville, more amused than ever with the excessive simplicity of his young bourgeoise; yet satisfied that she would be at home, and that he should see the Japan trays.

"Bravo, bravo! Well done us!" roared Lawless at this moment, clapping as heartily as if he had been in the pit of a penny theatre, for Auld Lang Syne had at length reached a terminus.

"Well *done*, indeed!" said Mrs. Sparkleton. "My fingers positively ache."

"What patience! what good nature!" murmured Lord Fitzhauton. Thanks were universally tendered to the alderman for his exertions to entertain the company; but the splenetic Bagshawe probably spoke its more sincere opinion when he interrupted the gratulations in these terms,—"How can you call that singing, Gullibull? It seems like a frog croaking in a cold!—I only hope this lady will take the din out of

our ears, by singing us something that has a little melody in it.—Ah, here's my favourite Irish melody!—Do sing us this; it's my favourite."

"If it is a part song, I shall be most happy to join in it," said the Reverend Gilbart Ruddimac, approaching, himself wearied of converting Miss Scurmucheon. "A little innocent amusement on a Sunday can never be offensive to that Being who created us to enjoy ourselves in this world and in the next!"

"It is not a part song, I am happy to say; it is a ballad of Moore's; the only one I ever could endure of his—no namby-pamby in it: plain, downright, good, bitter, sterling truth! 'When first I met thee warm and young,'" said Mr. Bagshawe. "Sing it, ma'am; will you sing it to oblige me?—Come, Miss Green; you have shrunk quite out of sight; come and hear this!"

Mrs. Sparkleton at first felt no great inclination to sing the song in question, with Lord Fitzhauton hanging over her and listening. But, on a moment's reflection,

she felt that with his good opinion of himself, and of his right to do anything that pleased himself, he would never imagine that she, of all people in the world, perceived any application to him in the bitterly mournful words of the melody. And yet she felt that it would gratify her own vague sentiments of indignation and scorn to utter them. Bagshawe also brought the almost obliterated Charity Green forward, with the declared purpose of letting her hear this particular melody—his own favourite—sung. Accordingly, Mrs. Sparkleton sung it. Her voice was by nature finely organized, and it had been cultivated with every resource of art. Her own feelings were in the verse, and she poured them forth with a passion and tenderness of grief, which completed her triumphs of the evening, and enabled the young ladies to declare afterwards, that she sung like an opera-woman, and that for their parts they would not for the world sing in such a "theatrical, affected manner."

We must plagiarize to be intelligible—or *transfer* is, perhaps, a more proper literary word.

"When first I met thee, warm and young,
There shone such truth about thee,
And on thy lip such promise hung,
I did not dare to doubt thee.
I saw thee change, yet still relied,
Still clung with hope the fonder,
And thought, though false to all beside,
From me thou couldst not wander.
But go, deceiver! go—
The heart, whose hopes could make it
Trust one so false, so low,
Deserves that thou shouldst break it.

"When every tongue thy follies nam'd,
I fled the unwelcome story;
Or found, in ev'n the faults they blam'd,
Some gleams of future glory.
I still was true when nearer friends
Conspir'd to wrong, to slight thee;
The heart, that now thy falsehood rends,
Would then have bled to right thee.
But go, deceiver! go—
Some day, perhaps, thou'lt waken
From pleasure's dream, to know
The grief of hearts forsaken.

"Even now, though youth its bloom has shed,
No lights of age adorn thee:
The few who lov'd thee once have fled,
And they who flatter scorn thee.
Thy midnight cup is pledg'd to slaves,
No genial ties enwreath it;
The smiling there, like light on graves,
Has rank cold hearts beneath it.
Go, go!—though worlds were thine,
I would not now surrender
One taintless tear of mine
For all thy guilty splendour!

"And days may come, thou false one! yet,
When even those ties shall sever;
When thou wilt call, with vain regret,
On her thou'st lost for ever;
On her who, in thy fortune's fall,
With smiles had still receiv'd thee,
And gladly died to prove thee all
Her fancy first believ'd thee.
Go, go!—'tis vain to curse,
'Tis weakness to upbraid thee;
Hate cannot wish thee worse
Than guilt and shame have made thee."

Mrs. Sparkleton was drawing towards the end of the last verse when a low, con-

vulsive sob arrested attention, and springing with alarm from the piano, she exclaimed, "Dear me!—How pale you are, Miss Green! What is the matter?"

"I—I don't feel very well—the heat of the room—my eyes are quite dizzy," sobbed Charity, covering her face with her hands.

"Poor thing, I dare say she is tired! We have had a fatiguing time of it to-day," said Mrs. Gullibull. "Come, Charity, dear, I am sure the company will excuse you. Go to bed, lovee, and sleep for money to buy a cow."

Charity, whose face still writhed with some internal, overmastering anguish, eagerly accepted this manumission, and muttering that she should be better, she knew, in the cool air, tottered out.

"Well!—I was afraid we were going to have a scene!" said Midas, who had turned very pale.

"She is rather sensitive—she isn't callous enough, I mean,—the song's too much for

her: I don't like true things myself!" muttered Bagshawe.

"Poor thing! I pity her if she has any feeling—I pity her very much," said Mrs. Sparkleton—resuming her seat and her song.

At its conclusion she arose, and declared she would sing no more that night for anybody; and abandoned the piano to the young ladies, some of whom had now taken courage, and desired to display their vocal abilities. This soon became intolerably wearisome, and the great Mr. Humson himself, feeling that the party could not last much longer, and that it was due to his dignity to break it up, did so by taking his departure. Mrs. Sparkleton immediately after gave it the coup-de-grace by retiring to equip for the same.

Midas undertook the office of seeing her to her carriage—a favour which could not well be refused to the son of the master of the house. The alderman himself would gladly have performed the office, but his

wife privately and efficaciously admonished him to the contrary. Mrs. Sparkleton was obliged to submit to a smacking kiss from Mrs. Gullibull, for she really relished her, and a most fervent, "God bless you, my dear; and come often and spend a long day with us soon!" and retired with the benediction on her head.

Not a word did Midas utter, till they reached the carriage, when he took the opportunity, as he handed her into it, to press a letter into her hand. "You promised me to read it most carefully—and you'll keep your word, won't you?" he said, quite bewitchingly.

"Oh, yes, of course," was the affable reply.

Midas, delighted, kissed his hand, and though the carriage rolled away without any sign of reciprocity from the fair occupant, he turned back on tiptoe, exulting as if in a completed conquest. His intention was instantly to go and take off his dress boots, which were too tight, and had

hurt him the whole day, and which he did not care to continue wearing, merely to fascinate Miss Fisher. He turned—and beheld Mr. Bagshawe coming out with his respirator on, and his umbrella in hand, intending to walk back to town for the benefit of his health.

"Getting on well there, my boy?" said he in his queer, snappish, quasi-good-humoured tones.

"*A few!*" replied Midas, with a wink, and in expressive slang.

"Well, well, all's well that ends well!—Good night, my boy!"

"Good night, sir!—D——d old everlasting nuisance!—I'm sure his money isn't worth it!" soliloquized Midas, as he re-entered the house.

"Scoundrel!—d——d young scoundrel!" mused Mr. Bagshawe, as he proceeded on his way. "And does he think to get my money when I die?—I rather think he won't though—a *few!*"

Lady Fitzhauton was determined to wait

to hear the progress of her brother's courtship, and that Lord Fitzhauton should hear it too, although he had shown every possible symptom of impatience and of a desire to be away ever since Mrs. Sparkleton had withdrawn. But so many people still remained, that she was obliged to content herself finally with telling Lord Fitzhauton as they went home, that she knew Midas had made a proposal, and that she *believed* it was accepted. They did not quarrel precisely on this subject, but they quarrelled vehemently about the colour of the carriage blinds, which his lordship insisted was crimson, while her ladyship was prepared to die maintaining that it was scarlet. As it was night, of course the fullest scope was allowed to the argument. Accordingly, Lord Fitzhauton retired to rest, with a firm conviction that his wife was the most obstinate, self-opinionated, senseless woman in the world; and Lady Fitzhauton expressed the same judgment of her lord, in a slightly varied manner, to the sympathizing

and thoroughly agreeing verdict of her lady's maid.

Lord Deville kindly afforded Mr. Twittlewit a seat in his carriage to town, and on the way he learned his opinion of the entertainment, the entertainers, and the guests, at some length. He learned that it was the dullest party Twittlewit had ever been at; the people the stupidest; that the wines were execrable, the soups burned, the jellies melted, the champagne, a vintage of gooseberries, the peerless Sherry, Marsala; and that all the women were dressed hideously, to a woman! And all because no one had asked Mr. Twittlewit to read a few lines from the third edition of his "Original Poems," which had just appeared, and which he carried, by mere chance, in his pocket, for that purpose.

It was almost midnight, when Putney Palace became at length cleared of its numerous visitants, and Alderman and Mrs. Gullibull were quietly discussing a good strong glass of brandy and water a-piece, a

beef sandwich, and the achievements of the day. Must we add, that even in that magnificent drawing-room, against every species of prohibition, the alderman was calmly smoking an old black pipe?

"Well, John, don't you think we did the thing to day? Wasn't everything quite the *ton?*" ejaculated Mrs. Gullibull, infinitely enjoying her first moment of peace for now nearly a fortnight. "Haven't we done it in style to-day?"

"What'll it cost?" returned Gullibull, a little gruffly.

"Oh, never mind, you'll know, you'll have the bills!—But do just look at everything! See how Ann's settled in life, and what a match Midas is going to make! It's all my doings; if it hadn't been for me, you would have married her to some wretched tallow-chandler or another."

"And perhaps it would have been better for her: all isn't gold that glitters," said the alderman. "But I had a finger in the pie, too, I should think. If I hadn't been able to give the girl the wherewithal——"

"Now don't take the credit from me, Mr. Gullibull! You must know in your conscience, it was all my manœuvring! You found fault about his being so involved; and now how happy she is!"

"She don't look so, somehow, though!—And about Midas: I thought at one time he had a sort of sneaking kindness for Charity."

"It must have been 'sneaking' indeed, when I never saw anything of it!" returned Mrs. Gullibull, indignantly. "Pray don't go on talking that way, and putting wrong ideas into the poor girl's head, and setting the servants talking."

"I an't!—who is here but our two selves?" returned the alderman. "I only say I thought so—though I couldn't well think so neither, for he was always so fond of money from a boy upwards. But as for Mrs. Sparkleton—I only wish it was my chance, old woman!"

"You wouldn't have the spirit to take it! You think everybody's so much above one!—*you* would never think of marrying

a duke's grand-daughter! You're quite antiquated in all your notions. Just look at your gaiters! Have gaiters been in fashion these fifty years?"

"Has rheumatism been out?"

"Well, keep on your old jog-trot! Thank goodness you have people of more sense about you."

"I almost wish sometimes I had kept on my old jog-trot! I could not make so much, but then it was sure," observed the alderman, with something resembling a sigh. "Well, have your own way, you, and mix me another glass, and we'll go to bed. Charity's got her night's rest nearly over by this time."

CHAPTER VIII.

On the following day, Mrs. Sparkleton and Lord Fitzhauton met one another riding in the park, accidentally—as they had previously arranged. Mrs. Sparkleton was a fine horsewoman; riding was her favourite exercise, though disused now for some time, and it gave a beautiful glow to her naturally fine complexion. She was in charming spirits, brilliantly gay and animated; only she complained that she did not like her horse, because it was a hired one, adding, with a smile, that she thought there was some evil spell in money, it spoilt everything it was applied to.

On the contrary, Lord Fitzhauton was in

a pettish, angry mood, which contributed to Mrs. Sparkleton's satisfaction. She knew the reason why, and it pleased her to see that he was jealous even of Midas Gullibull. Fitzhauton had soon still less reason to rejoice. It appeared that, on consideration, the fair equestrian had given up her intention of going to Willesden. It was too far for a first ride; the parks would do very well; one is never noticed in a crowd, whereas one's very groom might wonder to see one going a gipsying in the green lanes, with people!

"Yes," said his lordship, bitterly, "you wish to shun any kind of private discourse with me; any explanation on a subject which you know interests me greatly!"

"No, indeed! what can you possibly mean?" said Mrs. Sparkleton—and you would have sworn, from her countenance, she had not the faintest idea what he could mean—it was so full of innocent inquiry.

"Don't pretend *that*, Mrs. Sparkleton! I am not so easily deceived, you know,"

replied his lordship, vehemently switching his beautiful mare of the same name, over its veiny and sensitive neck, until it leaped high in the air with pain and rage. "You can't do *me* with that splendidly unconscious air!—You know what I mean: that thing of money, Midas Gullibull, has proposed to you! —And, I suppose you mean to accept him?"

"Of course, there cannot be any doubt upon that subject—but don't be so cruel to my namesake, unless you wish to make an example of her before me, for my benefit," replied the lady; and she continued to tease him for a considerable time after—during a canter twice round the park—with such half ironical replies. Firstly, because it pleased her to see him really and passionately jealous, and secondly, because she herself had not precisely resolved upon what she should do. Not that Mrs. Sparkleton had the remotest idea of accepting Midas Gullibull; but she had too many uses for him and his family, to resolve upon rejecting him absolutely. That she knew would

alienate the mother, deepen the daughter's suspicions, perhaps destroy her influence with the father and the mercantile world, with which he was her principal link. This was of the less consequence, perhaps now, as she knew Humson himself. Yet still she felt that with her total ignorance of business, she could not do without a constant and able adviser. She really scarcely comprehended distinctly where her money lay,—how it had been invested! It was very possible that Deville might altogether drop off, by and by, in his courtship, and it was advisable to give that abandonment the appearance of a rejection, by the presence of a substitute. Fitzhauton's dislike and contempt for his brother-in-law, would add fire to the spirit of rivalry which already animated him. And besides all these motives, Mrs. Sparkleton rather liked to increase than to diminish the number of her admirers. She liked admiration: she was young, beautiful, and vain: why not?

But, on the other hand, Lord Fitzhauton

insisted—with as much petulance as if he had some undoubted right to demand the sacrifice—that Mrs. Sparkleton should instantly reject Midas, at once and for ever. It amused her to observe with what haughty headstrong violence he urged the expediency of this measure upon her. He declared it was disgraceful to her to give even a moment's encouragement to such a fellow! Lord Fitzhauton had no great love or esteem for any part of his wife's family, but he now positively hated Midas. His sister herself did not like him, though they were what Mrs. Gullibull called "a pidgeon pair." Lady Fitzhauton always spoke of him under the sobriquet of "Take-all," and she found him daily growing more than ever a serious obstacle to her getting all she wanted from their mutual parents. Being "only children" it was to be expected that Midas and his sister should be greatly exasperated against each other; but their interests had of late clashed with violence.

Mrs. Sparkleton, however, knew better than to abandon her advantageous position. Really, Lord Fitzhauton,—I cannot see—what right you have—unless indeed as Mr. Gullibull's brother—to interfere! I am perfectly free and independent, and of an age to act for myself. You know I am past discretion now, by some years!"

Fitzhauton was still more exasperated, but he was humbled. "You had better almost have Deville—at least he will not beat you," he said, very bitterly. "But I only want to see Midas's letter, and to know what you answer him. I know his epistle will make one laugh—at least it is a model in the art of commercial love-making, I should think! Do let me see it, and your answer to it; I shall be quite content—if you could possibly have him—I should be quite content to—to be the most miserable man living! Yes, Mrs. Sparkleton, yes, I could endure never having you myself; I think I could!—I must!—but, by Heaven!—" and he flung himself in the

saddle so violently, that his horse started and plunged—"By Heaven! I will not endure that anybody else in the whole world shall have you—least of all, that brute!"

"Pray don't talk so vehemently—you excite attention," said Mrs. Sparkleton, calmly. "I saw Lady Wilmot check her ponies, and turn round to look at us. Pray don't get us into some of the scandalous on-dits!—Did you hear what they did for Lady Brahazan and Sir Harry Malpas, a few days ago?—Gave an authentic announcement of their approaching marriage, although they are both married to other persons already—merely because they were seen so much together."

"But you will let me see the fool's love-letter, will you not—just to give one a hearty laugh?"

"I haven't got it with me—do you think I carry such things about with me in my riding-habit? And, besides, do you expect me to hand it over to you, with people

staring at us, and wondering what it can be about?"

"Then I will come and see it at your house; you can show it me when I go back with you," said Fitzhauton, very eagerly.

"I don't intend to go back with you," replied Mrs. Sparkleton. "Mrs. Clackmannan is always at her drawing-room window next door—and, though an invalid, she sees a great deal of company. She will be sure to notice your horse at my door, describe it, and ask people whose it was, and wonder what particular reason brought you there. Besides, I promised the writer not to let anybody see or hear of his proposal, unless I accepted it."

"What, is he ashamed of his choice?—For my part I think it quite honour enough for such a stick to be rejected by you!"

"Well!—as a relation of Mr. Midas Gullibull, I think you have some sort of right to advise with me on the subject," said Mrs. Sparkleton, smiling. "So, if you will come to-morrow—before I go out—you

shall see it, and give me your opinion. Mrs. Clackmannan's chair is not wheeled to the window until a quarter past twelve."

"But will you promise to let me see the answer?" returned Fitzhauton. "I only want to see the answer to be quite happy, or quite miserable."

"You will be quite neither—at least if it depends on my *quite* accepting or *quite* rejecting Mr. Gullibull. I really have not decisively made up my mind—although I certainly never do intend to have him. Still, it is impossible to say what circumstances may arise—his family are of some use to me—I don't want to offend your wife mortally—and though she don't care much, I imagine, for her brother, she would take the opportunity to quarrel with me. You understand?"

Fitzhauton perfectly understood. He knew that it would not do for him to visit at Mrs. Sparkleton's, unless his wife visited her also. He was allured with the hope of seeing her, alone and confidentially, on the

following day, and he finally acquiesced, though still reluctantly, in the arrangement.

It was determined that he should call in the morning before Mrs. Clackmannan's chair was stationed at her usual point of observation, to hold a consultation on his brother-in-law's future happiness. And most punctually, he came. Lady Fitzhauton wondered, at ten o'clock, to hear that her lord had breakfasted and gone out, and she flew off to her mother's to hear whether Midas had received his answer.

There are no women so charming as Englishwomen, in the morning. They stand the test of the sunlight, with their clear, fresh, and natural complexions, mostly (until past forty at least) innocent of rouge and plaster. A Parisienne is horrible until after the toilette of the day is made, and it is rarely made until noonday. Mrs. Sparkleton looked particularly lovely, as we have formerly observed, in morning costume. Bright and pure as frosted silver, was all her array on this occasion. She

had taken great pains with it, having thoroughly quieted her conscience with the consideration that she certainly meant no harm—that Fitzhauton was a married man, and that therefore she could have no design upon him—and that as a relation by marriage, he had a right to interest himself in the subject they were to discuss.

She received him with something more than her usual engaging air of interest—with which indeed she received most people, however disagreeable to her. Perhaps she was pleased with the delight that sparkled in Fitzhauton's eyes—with the tenderness and warmth of his manner. Love is so delicious a nectar, that presented in any cup, it is always so sweet, if but to sip of it! And it is surprising how much a thing improves in zest by being of the forbidden kind! We doubt if any of Eve's daughters ever ate an apple with half the relish she did—and we know several men who, if their wives were other people's—would take the greatest delight in a society which

at present they seem by no means to appreciate. It is one of the proofs, we believe, of our nature being intended for something better than its present earthly uses, that nothing we ever possess satisfies it, and that all men, endowed with whatever worldly prosperity and enjoyment they may, die disappointed.

In other respects, Mrs. Sparkleton treated the interview as one of business. She amused herself with Fitzhauton's impatience by asking, quite anxiously, how his wife was? and smiled at his reply—"Oh, I never saw her—but I dare say she is as sulky and ill-tempered as ever!"

"Well, the letter is in the casket beside you—But, take care; you must not say you have seen it, or people will infer that—that we are very confidential! But don't imagine I think so depreciatingly of the composition as you do—without having seen it, too! I consider it quite a model in the art of making a proposal, without going too far—without *criminating* one's self too much!

Mind, I depend on your secrecy. Nobody in the whole world was to see it, or has seen it, or is to see it, but we two and the accomplished writer!"

This latter statement admitted of some little correction of errata. In the first place Midas had consulted with three of his cleverest friends in the composition, including a young lawyer's clerk, who had great poetical abilities (which he frequently displayed in his manner of engrossing, to the great displeasure of his master—a prosaic creature!) and another young city gentleman, who was well skilled in such matters, having written half a dozen proposals of his own. But besides these, Mrs. Sparkleton had read it, on the very night she received it, to her French maid, whom she made nearly die with laughter, by the tone of her perusal and comments. To be sure, she did this in strict confidence—which was the only way to get the news widely circulated, by the electric chain of communication, established among ladies' maids

and femmes de chambre, throughout the fashionable world.

Fitzhauton almost snatched the document, and read it aloud—at first trembling with apprehension and anger. But both feelings were speedily lost in contempt, and finally he burst out laughing, though probably not with the unmixed hilarity of Mademoiselle Florine's sentiments, which she felt herself at liberty to indulge to the utmost, never having received the slightest douceur from the hands of the writer. The letter was written on pink satin paper, and was enclosed in a lace envelope, curiously and beautifully ornamented as an arabesque valentine might have been, if the ingenious inventors of that species of ornamental design had observed our christian usages on fourteenths of Februaries.

"Putney Villa, July 9th, 18—.

"My dear Madam,—In compliance with your kind permission of the 30th ultimo, I beg leave to address you on the interesting

topic to which I have endeavoured to allude, so as to make my meaning quite plain, and to show that my intentions are as decidedly honourable. As you are a lady living by yourself, without any friends to protect you (at least that I have seen, for being at variance with your relations, you, of course, pay no attention to their advice), I think it right to put your mind quite at ease on this point. I beg leave, therefore, to assure you, *that my intentions are strictly honourable*; and I must take the liberty to say, that you are a lady calculated to make any gentleman happy, and as such I offer myself. I feel that I never could take such a fancy for any one as I have for you; and that without you (this passage owed its inspiration to the poetical clerk) this life will appear to me a *hopeless blank*, a *desert* from which the oasis of hope will have departed for ever! Indeed, I consider my position, so far as regards this world, to be altogether dependent on the kind reply which I have every reason to hope you will give, my dear

Madam; as, if everything be true that they say about widows, who have been well-treated in the first instance, you cannot have any aversion to the holy state yourself, personally.

"But now to business; for in an affair of this kind, one should treat all that relates to money matters in that light. I am aware that you have very considerable property left you by your late and respected lamented husband; but you will not imagine, I should think, my dear Madam, that my feelings are prompted by any mercenary motives, as I am well known to be the only son and heir of a business, which I may say, without pride, is one of the most eminent firms in the city of London, and imports the largest from all the ports of the Baltic, excepting Chaffcorn and Co., who also deal in timber, which we do not. But they have not a larger capital embarked, if my father had not speculated so foolishly out of his proper sphere, in railroads. It is true, I am only the junior partner, and have at present but

a small share (as such) in the business—and no control. But my father himself admits that it is full time for me to be settled in life, and has promised my mother repeatedly, that when I do so, I shall enter as full half partner, if I marry to his satisfaction—and considering the great fortune he has given my sister merely to marry her to a person with a title, I do not see why I should not look up too; and in the commonest fairness he cannot refuse—unless he means to make fish of one and flesh of the other—which my mother will not let him, if he were ever so much inclined. So I shall be sure to get one half of the business into my own hands; and this I can prove to the satisfaction of your solicitor, by our books, will not be worth less than five or six thousand pounds a year, to my share. I also am certain I could improve it, if I could only get the power to check the governor, into my hands—I don't say to what extent, but *something worth speculating on*. Of course, at his death I shall get

the whole. And supposing besides, I am admitted to half share in his railway specs. (which, however, I don't wish, but intend they shall go to his own private account, especially the liabilities,) it would probably be a good deal more. But however—even supposing that your late lamented husband left you five thousand a-year (which is the lowest figure I imagine you live at), I cannot be suspected of any mercenary motives. For besides all the above, I have seven thousand pounds of my own saving, which I do not wish to be mentioned, as perhaps the old people would not fork out handsomely in providing us with an outfit, (they did for my sister) and I can go to work much cheaper in the city in procuring things, than you probably think possible at the west-end. Besides, it would be a wholesale transaction, as we would have a large house handsomely furnished. I could furnish a house, I dare say, for half the sum you paid, quite as well as yours; but we would have one quite as grand as my

mother's, and hers is considered a model of taste.

"Besides all this I have very good expectations from my godfather, a very rich old gentleman, who has long been ailing, and on whose post obit, (if the property were only as firmly entailed upon me in law, as I know it is in fact) I could easily raise ten or twelve thousand, even if he were a healthy life. *But he is not.* He has a disease of the heart, and may die at any moment; and I have no doubt that, if your solicitor desires it, I could procure a certificate to that effect, from a surgeon.

"It is my intention to settle at least half your property on yourself for life; after that to go to the children; so that we should be sure never to come to want, whatever happened either in business or railroads, as the creditors could not touch your settlement. I don't think it at all a safe investment — I mean, in railroads, although my father is so foolishly rash and speculative in them.

"In conclusion, my dear Madam, I do not think it necessary to advise you to consider this proposal well. Your own good sense will sufficiently point out the advantages. And as I am not one of those people who cannot take 'no' for an answer, of course I shall not repeat it, unless it is embraced with equal cordiality. But I do not think you will have a better one offered every day. I can safely assure you (and could give it you in black and white, if necessary, on a person's oath) *that 'Lord Deville has not the least intention of ever marrying you.* I know it for a certain fact, that he is only *tantalising* with you. He told a friend of mine so—in fact, my sister,—in strict confidence, of course, so I must beg you not to mention it again, as it might expose me to an action.

"With a lady of your good sense and experience, I am quite aware that it is unnecessary to go off in any flummery about the love and affection, etc. that I feel for you. I have often heard my mother

say that 'Love comes with the pillow,' and that she did not like my father until a good bit after they were married. So that if even we had no love for one another at the beginning—when we were man and wife, and found we could not help ourselves—we should be sure to get accustomed to one another's ways, and get very fond of each other. But the truth is (here the legal poet's pen came into play again), I was *dotingly attached* to you, from the moment I saw you, and considered you as the sun and star of my existence henceforth, day and night! Now, although not of such noble birth as you are, (which I don't pretend to) I can't think the match so unequal, as I shall be sure in the end to have more than ten times as much money to counterbalance it. Then when you consider you are the only woman I ever really loved, or would marry, (and I have had offers of plenties, if you will believe me—I could even show you their letters, and I have enough hair to make a dozen wigs, of

young ladies,) I think you will see that the happiness of my whole life is at stake! Our ages are not incompatible, for the man ought to be older than the woman, and though I am four and thirty, I understand you are twenty-six. Indeed I one day heard Miss Scurmucheon argue you must be twenty-eight, by the late Lady Fitzhauton and your mother being confined at the same time—I don't mean her mother, but Lord Fitzhauton's. But that I don't believe.

"Expecting your favourable reply, and leave to pay my respects as soon as possible, (when I shall perhaps venture on a liberty I never yet did,)—so *look alive*—believe me, my dear Madam, to be at heart, what I soon hope to be in the eye of the law,—Your most obedient humble servant,

MIDAS GULLIBULL.

"Mrs. Sparkleton.

"P.S. and N.B.—*Delays are dangerous.* I should like our affair to come off as soon as possible, to be able to control my father. Mother also goes on in the most senseless

manner possible, with those Fitzhautons. That proud conceited husband of Ann's is not a bit too proud, I can assure you, to pick everything he can lay his hands on, with all his birth and titles. He was as poor as a rook when she married him, and has done nothing ever since but feather his own nest, at our expense; and my mother is fool enough—dishonest enough, I call it, —to help them!"

"Ah! I did not mean you to read that absurd postscript," said Mrs. Sparkleton, putting her hand over the extract in question, but not until it was too late.

"Wretched huckster! paltry money-bag! lying rascal!" exclaimed Lord Fitzhauton, throwing down the epistle, and stamping upon it with rage. "But I'll bring him to account for what he says about me, at all events! It may be true about my fool of a wife, who is never content but when she is pillaging something or another from her still more stupid mother—but to dare

to say such a thing of me! I'll horsewhip him in your presence, whether you marry him or not, but ten times worse if you do!"

"Perhaps he will not let you. He is rather a strong looking person, and seems to have no great respect for your superiority of station," said Mrs. Sparkleton, offended at the possibility of such an event happening even to an impossible husband of hers, and carefully raising and uncrumpling the letter. "But did you not promise to consider whatever I might tell you on the subject as a secret confided to your honour?"

"But how could you ever think of giving such a peddling wretch the slightest encouragement?"

"I *must*, you know; and, besides, it is a most excellent offer," said Mrs. Sparkleton, with the most provoking gravity.

"He is below contempt—a regular counter-jumper, to all intents and purposes!" replied Fitzhauton. "But what is that he says about Deville? What the devil! does

the old coxcomb pretend to pay his court, then, only in jest?"

Mrs. Sparkleton coloured externally, and internally felt all of a glow with exasperation. "Oh, no! he is quite in earnest—I could have him any day; but I wont have him!" she exclaimed. "But your wife—you'll excuse me, Fitzhauton—she is really quite absurd in everything of that sort; and because Lord Deville pays her some attentions—to vex me, I suppose—she imagines—she th[illegible]s, and quite hints it to me myself! that he has formed a sentimental plan to [illegible]e of hopeless love for *her!*"

"He deserves to be shot for his impudence, if he ever had such an idea!" returned Fitzhauton. "Lady Fitzhauton must be out of her mind if she thinks that any man dared have the impudence to pretend to flirt with my wife. But it is all her own folly and vanity! Who in the world would ever think of her that might make pretensions to you?"

"Deville, of course, has no such ideas,

and, I must confess, Lady Fitzhauton is really rather silly on these points," said Mrs. Sparkleton, in an apologetical tone; "but then she is young, and not accustomed to the light *persiflage* of society, and fancies everything in earnest."

"Well, she is even more absurd than I thought her. DeVille durst as soon swallow a sword, like a conjuror, as think of flirting with a wife of mine," replied Fitzhauton. "He knows I am not a great milky target, set up to be shot at, like that poor fellow he nearly killed once: though, as for Lady Fitzhauton, if she were *not* my wife, he might have her, and welcome! No; I don't mean that; but I positively am disgusted with her folly! And if he tries to make you jealous in such a stupid way—which is his object, of course, if he has any—if I were you, I would cut him for ever for it!"

"And make myself as ridiculous as your wife, by entering into her nonsensical idea?" said Mrs. Sparkleton, smiling irresistibly, as she added, "Pray, would you not a good

deal rather Deville married me than ran away with your wife?"

"Ran away with my wife!"

"Ay; what would you do then?"

"I'd shoot him, and—be much obliged to him," said Fitzhauton, laughing, after a pause.

"And if he were to marry me?"

"I should not be obliged to him at all, and I do believe I should kill you—though I don't know where I could begin at you, I love every part of you so well!" said his lordship, with ardour.

"Nonsense! we must not talk such nonsense as this; though I don't see what great harm it is, if one does nothing wrong, for people to like one another. They can't help *that*—at least, I can't. I have known you so long, that I should be obliged to forget half myself, if I forgot you; and the pleasantest part of my life, too; one would not willingly forget that! For my part, if any man ran away with my wife—unless I was very fond of her—I should never

think of shooting him, but get a divorce, and marry another more to my liking."

"I'd shoot him, and her, and all mankind!" said Fitzhauton, with as much anger as if he were himself the most exemplary and attached of husbands. "But, I suppose, you will be married soon to this wretched gold-grubber, and then I do most cordially hope you will play him some such trick for his insolence in aspiring to you."

"You are quite mistaken: when I next promise to love, honour, and obey, I shall take care it is to a person with whom I can keep my word," said the lady disdainfully.

"You cannot have Gullibull, then—that's certain! Do let me see your answer," said Fitzhauton, very eagerly. "I hope you have let him see *that* clearly, for it is really a disgrace to you, Mrs. Sparkleton, to have such a fellow after you."

"Here is a copy—the original has probably reached its destination now," replied Mrs. Sparkleton, quite carelessly. "Excuse the spelling—it is not mine—it is Florine's.

I thought it advisable to keep a copy, but I could not be at the trouble of making it myself."

Lord Fitzhauton took the paper with great eagerness and very considerable surprise. He thought he was sent for to be consulted, and he found that the subject in deliberation was already decided beyond the power of revocation.

When he had read the reply—with which we shall oblige the reader at a future period —he did not seem at all pleased with it. First, he objected to sending an answer at all—the "fellow wasn't worth it." Next, though it did not accept the writer's offer, it did not absolutely and peremptorily refuse it. It gave too much hope; it was cruel to the "*poor fellow*" himself, since she did not, in reality, intend to give any. This was explained to be necessary: Mrs. Sparkleton could not possibly, at that particular period, quarrel with the Gullibull family. Then he objected to phrases—as if it were any longer possible to alter any

—and altogether took up so much time in finding fault with the letter, and in decrying the personage to whom it was addressed, that Mrs. Sparkleton really and truly started when at last her eye fell accidentally on a chronometer on the shelf.

"Dear me! It is not very polite, but I must really now beg of you to go, my lord. You have been here nearly these three hours, and the servants will begin to think it strange!" she exclaimed; "especially as I ordered no one should be admitted until you went."

"Well; but when shall I see you again?" replied Fitzhauton, reluctantly rising—a ceremony which Mrs. Sparkleton had already performed. "What a fool I am to sit here talking about other people's affairs! But I can't live without seeing you, and I will not."

"I shall visit Lady Fitzhauton to-morrow," replied Mrs. Sparkleton.

"But, what do you think? She is in a fit of the sulks, and she pretends she is ill;

and so I heard her tell the people not to let any one in, and to send for her mother, and a foolish old family doctor they have."

"I suppose he will give her a complaint, if she has none," replied Mrs. Sparkleton, with a satirical smile. "But I am not supposed to be in possession of this bulletin, so I will send to invite you both to meet the new ambassador, on Saturday, at dinner here. If she can't come, she surely will not be so *very* ill but that you can!"

"But I can't live a day without seeing you!" exclaimed Fitzhauton.

"That would be a pity! I assure you I should be quite inconsolable if you should die! How should I amuse myself?" replied the lady with some gaiety and much more tenderness. "But," she continued, with seriousness, "I feel more than ever the necessity of parting."

"And I the impossibility!" said Lord Fitzhauton, with fervour.

"Folly! we must part, and meet henceforth only as friends. Is that agreed upon,

for otherwise I really must determine never to see you again?"

"I will see you always, if you hid yourself in the well of a pyramid! I will never suffer you out of my sight again while I have life!" returned the young nobleman. "Nobody—not even my foolish, pettish wife—can envy me that satisfaction. Surely, at least, I may see you in public! Once you used often to get out of your carriage and walk, in Paris. It is good for your health. Why can't you a little in London? I am sure Hyde Park is quite as pleasant—at least, near Kensington Gardens—as the Bois de Boulogne!"

"Well, perhaps I may give Fidele an airing to-morrow; the poor animal has not been out for several days," replied Mrs. Sparkleton, laughingly. "I dare say he has no particular choice of localities, and I may as well let him take his promenade there as elsewhere. I don't promise, mind, for certain. My complaisance will not extend, for example, to carrying him an

umbrella. I don't promise, in fact, to be anywhere at all to-morrow; I may be ill. I don't feel very well now."

"But you *must* promise me one thing—No, you must swear it," said Fitzhauton, eagerly, though pleased even with this dubious assent.

"What is it? I am no knight in romance, to grant a boon before I know what it is."

"If that odious fellow comes near you—if he has the impudence to think of taking the slightest—I hardly know what to call it—liberty—he is such a gross fellow!—promise me, you will never let him. You will repulse him with the utmost scorn."

"Well," said Mrs. Sparkleton, much amused, "I shall have the vanity just now to really believe you are jealous of me—most preposterously jealous!"

"I am, upon my soul!" replied his lordship, vehemently. "I love you better than my soul, for, you know, the parsons say that a married man that loves is sure to be damned!"

"Love me as much with your *soul*, as you like," replied Mrs. Sparkleton. "And if I have your heart I don't in the least care who has the rest of you! I don't, upon my soul, too! And as to Midas—Midas Gullibull—when *you* know so well I never suffer the slightest personal liberty. It is taste, perhaps, more than discretion. I do perfectly abhor rudeness of the kind."

"Oh, yes; I remember very well—but too well—how angry you once were with me at Chantilly; the only time, I do believe, when I ventured on the most innocent freedom I ever took in my life!" replied Fitzhauton, warmly. "I declare I trembled all over, like an aspen leaf, when I kissed your sweet lips, instead of your hand, which I had always done of a morning — and the colonel came out of the shrubbery almost at the same instant."

"Go, go; it was all nonsense—madness. Let us talk of something else," said Mrs. Sparkleton, with heightening complexion.

"To this day I am not quite certain that he did not observe you."

"Well, but I may kiss your hand *now* before we part, without fear of his espionage. I may do that, may I not?"

"No, no," said Mrs. Sparkleton, essaying to withdraw her hand from the eager grasp of her *ci-devant* admirer. "You must be quite cured of that folly now, and *ce n'est que le premier pas qui coute!*"

Wisely proverbialized, Mrs. Sparkleton! and quite as sententiously delivered as if the first step were not already made! Whether it was wisely done to withdraw her hand, as she did, with great vivacity, from the execution of his lordship's threat, we cannot say. But this we can, that, much against her will, and infinitely to her anger, as she evinced by a very passionate remonstrance, and the most beautiful increase of complexion possible, the mark of homage was transferred by the audacious peer to her cheek! She did everything that was proper on the occasion; nor was

she at all appeased, until Lord Fitzhauton had assured her, upon his knees, that it was an unavoidable accident—begged pardon, in that attitude—and promised, upon his word and honour, never to repeat the offence.

Fitzhauton then withdrew, and for about ten minutes Mrs. Sparkleton thoroughly despised herself. But the remembrance of Lady Fitzhauton's revelation about Deville restored her, by the indignation it inspired in her heart against them both. It seemed certain that his lordship had sacrificed her to please the vanity of Lady Fitzhauton. How else but from himself could she have acquired the knowledge of the fact? She consoled herself by thinking that her rival's conduct, for a wife, was quite as blameable as her own, for a widow—that she meant no harm—that none would come of it; and if Lady Fitzhauton thought proper to flirt with Viscount Deville, she could not see but that her husband was justified in flirting a little with—the honourable Mrs. Sparkleton!

CHAPTER IX.

ABOUT a fortnight after the great dinner at Alderman Gullibull's, and while it still furnished his consort with infinite matter of discourse, mingled with obscure but lofty hints of great consequences thence to flow, of some good fortune likely to befal the family, in the person of its heir, which, it seemed, was to be kept secret until ripe, but which was pretty evidently in the matrimonial line — one morning Charity Green asked leave to go and see some old friends of her mother's, whom she had not visited for a long time. Mrs. Gullibull went on the prudential plan of those sagacious mistresses of families who stipulate with

their servants that they shall have no "followers." Charity filled but a little higher station in the house, and Mrs. Gullibull so decidedly considered and treated her niece's poor connexions in the light of troublesome hangers-on, that very few of them indeed ever ventured to cross her hospitable threshold.

But Mrs. Gullibull had no great objection that her niece should occasionally go and see these people, since such was apparently her only pleasure. Of late she had even herself at times suggested a visit of the kind to her niece. The truth is, Mrs. Gullibull was a good deal annoyed latterly—notwithstanding the brilliant prospects of the rest of her family—with the girl's evident drooping of spirits, her melancholy and absent demeanour. She was no longer so useful to her as formerly—neglected a great many responsibilities which had silently, in the course of time, devolved upon her, and Mrs. Gullibull was obliged to reprimand her much oftener than usual,

and with much more asperity. Nothing could be more provoking than Charity's spiritless resignation to these attacks; it was like hammering at a flint that has no fire in it; not a single spark rewarded the strokes of the steel! There was something so upbraiding in that silence, so accusing in that submission, that Mrs. Gullibull not unfrequently lost temper, and wished the girl at Jericho; she put her out of all patience, she said, with her dull, insensible ways.

She was accordingly rather pleased than otherwise, when Charity asked leave on this occasion to go on a visit to some of her mother's former friends. There were an old clerk, his wife, and three daughters, dressmakers, who lived at Somers Town, whom Charity sometimes went to see; but on the present excursion Charity intimated that she meant to try and find out a certain Miss Dishnap, who kept a stand in a bazaar somewhere at the west-end of the town, and who had been one of the kindest

and faithfullest of her mother's friends. Though very poor herself — to believe Charity—she had frequently relieved them in their necessities, and they still owed her, (for she often spoke of her mother as if still alive,) she thought, no less a sum than fifteen shillings and ninepence, which ought to have been paid long ago.

"Well, I approve of principle, and you ought to pay her now, I own," said Mrs. Gullibull. "Have you got the money? If you haven't, you can get it out of my bag, on the dressing-table: give her a sovereign, if you like. And I dare say she will be proud and pleased to see how you remember her in your prosperity; but don't invite her here, you know. You can't receive your visitors in the kitchen, and really they are such a set of scarecrows that the servants don't know where else to show them. You remember, when those dressmakers came after you, how shocked you were at John's mistake, in taking them down the area?"

"Not at all; I was as glad to see them as if I had received them in the drawing-room of a palace," replied Charity. "But you need not be afraid of Miss Dishnap, aunt. She is of too independent a character; and I don't believe she places the slightest value on grand carpets and chairs, and things of that sort."

"You can let her see over the house some day when we are out, Charity, if you like," said Mrs. Gullibull, graciously; she could not believe such nonsense as that. "And you might invite her even to lunch, when I'm in town, if she isn't a person that pulls things about. I don't mind people looking at the furniture, for that's what it's for."

Charity made no further reply; and Mrs. Gullibull grew so kind that she wanted to send a footman with her niece, to make sure that she went safely, and was treated with proper respect. "Oh, no, aunt, I should look like a housemaid out with him for the day, for I don't mean to dress at

all smart. I want to go about quite unnoticed."

"Then you had better go in the carriage, my dear," said the affectionate aunt.

"No, I will not; I mean to go in an omnibus," returned Charity, energetically; "I should be lost in a carriage by myself; and it is such a trouble! I have only to pay sixpence for an omnibus, and have done with it."

Mrs. Gullibull was obliged to content her almost maternal anxiety by sending a footman with Charity, until she got into the omnibus for town, ordering him to pay the fare, and to tell the conductor to be sure and be very careful of the young lady inside, and put her down at a certain street and corner nearest her destination. This the conductor faithfully promised, exchanging a laugh and a twist of the cheek with the careful lackey — and never bestowed another thought on the subject.

Charity was even more plainly dressed than usual; there was nothing whatever to

call attention in her personal appearance. But there was an expression in her countenance which moved even the casual passengers in an omnibus to compassion and secret wonder what deep sorrow could have assailed a creature so young and simple-hearted, evidently. Yet she felt inwardly quite calm and resolved — so as she had never felt before when out by herself and thrown into complete self-dependence, and which was really surprising in a creature so nervously organized, bent on such an enterprise. But a courage was aroused in her of which once she could not have dreamed herself possessed—a courage which often sleeps in the depths of sensitive and apparently timorous natures — not loud, energetic, and dazzling—but unshakeable, when fairly in arms.

The conductor forgot to warn his fare at the nearest point to the bazaar in question. He was busied at the moment in considering how he should get rid of a very bad sixpence, which had been returned to him

now some several dozen times, when he had endeavoured to pass it in change. He felt that Charity would have taken it, but her fare was already paid, and he recollected her only on that account. The young lady herself took no notice that she went past what was stated to be her destination, and finally arrived at the Bank, with the omnibus. Was this forgetfulness or ignorance? Neither. Charity knew well that the omnibus was going to the Bank, and that she was going in it.

Nevertheless she paid but little regard to the diversified and changeful scene around her. The multitudes that swept through the crowded streets, who appeared and disappeared in the vehicle which conveyed herself, who jostled one another on the pavement, or trampled on her feet, and stumbled over her in trying to reach places, when the slam of the door and the false "All-right!" of the conductor, sent them pitching into them—everything affected her only as a dream might one who was conscious in his

sleep, that he beheld the phantasmagoria of one pass. All that she really noticed was a crying child, on which she bestowed a sweet biscuit,—a child that no one else had any consideration for, except to execrate its noise, for its mother wore an old plaid cloak, and poverty appeared in every thread of her garb. A cleanly, decent poverty indeed, and full of sorrows; for it appeared (she told her history, in some measure touched by this mark of commiseration) that her husband was a ship-carpenter out of work, that she had taken her child to a hospital, where she had been informed it was incurably blind, and that she had to walk with it in her arms from the place where the omnibus stopped to Deptford. Charity gave the poor woman one of seven-and-twenty shillings she possessed in the world, and alighted at a certain point which she was now informed she had reached. The conductor had just remembered her case, and apprehensive that she would find fault with him for taking her so far out of her

way, had made up his mind to abuse her for riding to a greater distance than she had paid fare for. But finding that she inquired quite equably "Is this the Bank?" he limited his operations to a demand for another sixpence, received a shilling, paid his bad one in change, and with his invariable "All right!" disappeared, vehicle and all, in great haste. But the injured party had never even thought of looking either at his badge or his sixpence.

Charity found herself in the bewildering vortex of that famous thoroughfare of the world, before the high temple of the divinity on whose altar she felt herself fastened a living, palpitating victim, ready for sacrifice, —surrounded by its hurrying worshippers. It was a hot, garish day; she had forgotten her parasol, and felt dizzy and dazzled with heat and light, after her long ride in the shade. She had never been so far into the city alone; she did not know her way in its intricacies; and while she hesitated, rude crowds jostled past her; pickpockets watched

her — so did policemen. She felt so agitated that she did not like to subject herself to any scrutiny—to enter a shop to inquire her way. Moreover the buildings around did not look like shops, but like stately palaces, into which she could not venture to set her foot.

After a few moments of suspense, she, however, arrived at the conviction that she could not possibly find the way to her uncle's counting-house, unassisted, though she had sometimes followed her aunt to it; but it was without observation of localities. She inquired the way to Allthrift-court of a man who was endeavouring to sell a splendid peacock, which he carried fastened to his wrist, probably expecting that some merchant would purchase it as an ornament to his country villa. But he only answered by eulogising the beauty of his bird, and promising to allow her something handsome for herself if she could induce her master or mistress to buy it.

"It must needs be that there is some-

thing menial in my appearance! Midas is perhaps right—perhaps I am not fit to be his wife!" ruminated Charity Green, in the sadness of her heart.

"Buy a peacock! buy a beauty, my lady, to day!" exclaimed the birdman. A coarse, vulgar-looking old woman, passed at the moment, but very finely dressed; and Charity was reconciled to the bird-fancier's estimate of her rank in society. She renewed her application to him with great mildness, and the fellow, with a stare and a grin, directed her at last in a way which she thought she also remembered was the one she usually went with her aunt.

How it happened, we know not. Perhaps the bird-fancier directed her wrongly, for the sake of what such gentry are wont to call a "lark." But Charity missed her proper route, and after some anxious walking, found herself in a long narrow street, crowded with wagons and pedestrians; the latter of whom were nearly all of the masculine gender, and seemed hurrying past her

with extraordinary precipitation. She soon guessed the cause, for the clock struck one, and she remembered that it was the hour when clerks dine and masters luncheon. This reflection added to her anxiety, for she wished to arrive in Allthrift-court at this comparatively private time. She renewed her inquiries, of two gentlemen who were busied in stowing a cargo of small but very heavy bags, into a cab. The genius of gold still haunted her; it was a money-changer going to some bank with a large quantity of foreign coin, and who was too much absorbed in his charge to take the slightest notice of what she said. A drayman, who happened to pass at the moment, did, and directed her so circumstantially, that Charity had not the slightest suspicion he was drunk, and implicitly followed his guidance. The consequence was that in a short time she was more at a loss than ever, more involved in a maze of crooked lanes and streets; in the midst of which she paused at last,

vexed and breathless, and found herself, by a singular and to many not very pleasing chance, beside the gratings of one of those churchyards which sometimes startle the stranger in the midst of the bustle and roar of the city, with their green tranquillity and silence.

It was indeed a curious oasis of calm in the heart of the turbid and restless haunts of business and toil around! An oasis of death, that looked like one of refreshing coolness and repose to the aching and wearied eyes which now gazed through the lofty iron gratings of the street into its solitude. Grass of extraordinary length and brilliantly glossy verdure, shone and waved pleasantly in the mid-day sun within, studded with neat white tombstones, like rows of dominoes, and shadowed with tall and healthy-looking trees, and the reverend though much crowded and hemmed-in pile of an ancient church. Charity was no chemist, no sanitary-movement woman, or she would have known that this church-

yard was very much out of place in the midst of the crowded streets and dwellings of the living. It communicated a species of calm and melancholy pleasure to her harassed soul, to contemplate this deep rest amidst so much turmoil—this place of everlasting calm amid everlasting cark! "At worst I shall only come to this," she said to herself, very placidly; felt something tug at her pocket, turned, and perceived an urchin glide away from beside her. He wore the yellow breeches and blue tufted cap of a charity-boy, and the poor girl never dreamed—till at a subsequent period she found her purse gone—that the innocent little creature was a pickpocket.

After some further trouble and inquiry, Allthrift-court was at last discovered by Charity, when she had begun almost to imagine that it must have changed its usual locality. With a heart that beat violently as she moved, she entered the low archway which conducted into a paved court. On one side was a long, low, small-paned

window, painted black in the sashes; no one could tell what colour it was elsewhere. Perhaps it had once been white. Some dozen little heaps of grain, disposed at far intervals along this window, were all that marked what species of business was carried on within; all that distinguished the offices of the richest corn-factor in London from a neighbouring pile of dirty, hopeless-looking chambers, in which nevertheless vast masses of property hourly changed hands.

Allthrift-court had in former ages been the residence of some of those great merchant-princes who, two centuries ago, never dreamed of severing their domestic existence from the places of their traffic. It bore still traces of its original destination. The counting-house into which Charity entered, with a faltering step, had once been a large and lofty hall, surrounded by carved woodwork, with high windows of elaborate design, now darkened with neglect and grime. Instead of hospitable tables and benches, with flagons ready for the

guests, high desks and stools were set around the chamber, spread with ledgers and account-books. Charity had timed her visit judiciously, according to calculation, for, after all, she had only lost about half an hour in looking for her way. The majority of the clerks had gone to their dinners; only two remained to keep guard, seated aloft at their books.

One person nevertheless was there of whom Charity had not devised any apprehension, but whom it vexed her a good deal to meet. This was Lawless. He passed her just as she entered, with his ruthlessly impudent stare. Evidently he thought he knew her, though he had not taken sufficient notice of her at the dinner party to be certain on this point. But his presence afforded her the satisfaction of ascertaining that the alderman was on 'Change, for she heard Lawless saying as she entered, "Then I must go after the old boy to Mark Lane," with his usual impudence of familiarity.

She had hardly, however, got to the end of her own timid and half-breathless inquiry if Mr. Midas Gullibull was in the office, when Lawless came back, under pretence of ascertaining when the alderman would be in again; in reality, to take another stare at Charity. He was satisfied this time, perhaps, that he did not know her, and besides acquired the valuable information that the alderman was gone on the Stock Exchange, and not on the Corn Exchange, and that the time of his return was quite uncertain. He gave a brisk whistle at this intelligence, as if it pleased him. "Ah, I suppose he's getting funky about that line, too!—Tell him when he comes in that I've gone down about it to Humson's; he'll find me at Humson's, mind. Where can I get a 'bus?—Though hang it, I think I'll take a cab." And the worthy disappeared.

These two clerks mounting guard, ranked as the juniors of the establishment. One of them was about fifty years old, personally, the other about eighteen. They were both

engaged in copying letters into a ledger, and seemed quite absorbed in their task. The elder one, whom Charity instinctively addressed, never raised his eyes from his ponderous tome, until she had repeated her question, and then he answered, abruptly and snappishly, that Alderman Gullibull was out. Then he seemed struck with the circumstances of the inquiry, raised his heavy eyelids, and stared very suspiciously at the querist.

He was still more surprised and disquieted when a third repetition of the inquiry informed him that the visitor desired to speak with Mr. Midas Gullibull, and not with his father. It happened that neither of these junior clerks knew Miss Green. If ever they had seen her, it was in the overpowering company of her aunt, who suffered no one to be visible but herself. The elder one saw that she was young, pale, and agitated. He did not like her looks at all, and the only answer

he made to the third query was a stern and most discouraging "What?"

While Charity patiently resumed her explanation, the old junior endeavoured, with all the aids of his experience, to unravel who she could be, and what such an apparition in a merchant's counting-house portended. He had no reason to suspect his young master of any leaning to the softer weaknesses, but could not help thinking there was something remarkably odd in this matter.

"I don't know whether he's in or not; if he is, he's busy; what's your business, ma'am?" he replied, after a pause.

"I have business with him—I am his cousin — I want to speak a few words with him in private," said Charity, shrinkingly.

"His cousin!"—repeated the clerk, with a look as if he thought this was making rather a strong demand on his credulity. "His cousin?—I didn't know Mr. Gullibull had any—but if he has—Pray, ma'am,

what's your name, and I'll send in to ask if he's at home?"

"My name is Green—he knows me quite well—I had breakfast with him—he'll be sure to see me!" said Charity, eagerly.

"I haven't seen him go out; but I'll send in to inquire whether he an't," replied the venerable junior, shrewdly suspecting that Mr. Midas would not choose to be in to such a customer.

"He isn't out, Mr. Maunders; I know Mr. Midas is in his room," said the young clerk, at this juncture.

"I believe he is at his luncheon; he won't like to be disturbed, Mr. Toplady," replied the elder junior, and raising his desk he coolly took out another letter, and began copying it.

"But I *must* see him! I come from his mother's; I have a message of great importance for him!" said Charity, with desperate energy.

"Has she come here to blubber and kick up a row about a baby, or some rubbish of

that sort?" mused Mr. Maunders. "If so, I shall get into a pretty mess by letting her go up! But then she may make a disturbance down here, and perhaps break the windows, and then I shall be blamed for not letting her go in quietly."

The younger junior solved this perplexity. "Mr. Rustisaw is in his room above; he will know best whether Mr. Midas is in or not," said he; and as his senior made no further objection, he arose and very courteously opened a door of the counting-house into a lobby. "There, Miss, go up two pair, and take the right hand office, and go in where you see a brass plate with 'Import' on it, and you'll find an old gentleman with blue spectacles on, who will tell you all you want to know, from a pin to an anchor."

Charity gladly passed from the presence of the Cerberean clerks, and perceived a wide staircase of the massive proportions of ancient carpentry before her, uncarpeted, black with the tramp of unnumbered feet,

and lighted by a perpetual fog of yellow window panes.

"I hope she's a good one and come to give it him in the right style! What precious fun it will be to see the row!" ejaculated Mr. Toplady, as the door closed. "Don't you remember the jolly row he made when Fanny Hopkins called upon me here, from the theatre?—I hope she'll give it him!"

"*We* shall catch it if she does, Toplady," replied the senior junior, who otherwise rather enjoyed the prospect—for every one in the office, with the single exception perhaps of Rustisaw, over whom he exercised no control, detested Midas as a domineering, dissatisfied tyrant.

Arriving on a landing-place, according to direction, Charity tapped gently at a door which had the required brass plate on it. No reply was made, and she ventured to open it to ascertain if any one was within. And sure enough there sate old Rustisaw, perched at a very high desk, with little

balustrade railings round it, engaged so absorbedly in perusing a particular column of the paper, assisting his vision with his finger along the lines, with his spectacles almost into the print, every wrinkle in his countenance bent and as it were converging towards the subject of his perusal, that Charity was for a moment amazed how any earthly business, apart from human affections, could interest a human being so much. But she was still more surprised to see how startled he was at her approach. Rustisaw leaped up with a suddenness that almost overset his lofty stool; clutched up with great rapidity what appeared to her a number of copy-book slips, thrust them into his pocket-book, clasped it, and pushed it into the breast pocket of his coat, almost, as Charity thought, before he took a second glance at her, or comprehended who it was that had interrupted his meditations. "Yes, Sir, coming directly, Sir! I was just looking down the share list; but though things do look very promising—God

bless me, ma'am! who are you? Why, I declare, if it isn't Miss Green of Putney!"

Charity afterwards thought there was something of guilty confusion in the surprise of the confidential clerk. But at present she thought only of her purpose, and as quietly as she could, informed Mr. Rustisaw that she desired to see his young master on particular business—a message from his mother. This was certainly not true, but Charity was obliged to stretch a point or two on this memorable occasion. Mr. Rustisaw immediately resumed his habitual humility and stiffness of manner. He very respectfully handed Miss Green a chair—the only one in the room—hoped there was nothing sudden or unpleasant?—and having received for reply that it was only a little commission to be executed, he left the apartment to seek Mr. Gullibull, junior, as he very properly styled his principal's son.

Five minutes of intense suspense followed for Charity Green. She imagined they were certainly consulting how to get rid of

her,—that Midas would not see her. He had so perseveringly denied her all opportunity for question or explanation at home, that she was in a manner compelled, as a last resource, to seek him where she thought he could not, in fear of the inferences which might be drawn, refuse her the satisfaction she was at last determined—cost what it might—to obtain. He was driven to a corner, but might he not still escape?

It is probable that Midas would have been glad to effect this object, if he could have managed it with any propriety, when he learned the name of his visitant. But he felt that it would have a most suspicious and extraordinary appearance to deny himself, even to the demure and taciturn chief-clerk. He armed himself with the reflection that Charity was so timid it was probable that she had really come with some message from his mother, who might be shopping in the neighbourhood. He could not think that she would venture to take him to task; or if she had made up her mind to so audacious

a proceeding, it was in fact better that the discussion should take place remote from witnesses, and strictly between themselves.

He therefore requested Rustisaw to put the cork in a small bottle of pale ale which he was taking with a chop, (Midas was not extravagant in eating or drinking, when doing either at his own expense,) and to do him the favour of waiting in his office till he returned. He then proceeded, with the reluctant step of a schoolboy who has every reason to expect a sound flogging, to seek the presence of his cousin.

Yet if Charity had been the injuring instead of injured party, she would probably not have felt so alarmed and shaken as she now was by the dread creak of those approaching boots. Midas entered, and Charity rose to receive him in a flutter and tremble which it was impossible for her to conceal, and which restored him to all his wonted arrogance of superiority. He shook her slightly by the hand, and observing, "Pray keep your seat—what in the world

brings you here in business hours?" drew Mr. Rustisaw's high stool, and seating himself, carelessly dusted one of his boots with his pocket handkerchief, so as very nicely to conceal a very considerable portion of anxiety.

CHAPTER X.

CHARITY essayed to answer, but twice or thrice when she began to speak, a choking sensation in her throat rendered her incapable of utterance. Still she would not suffer one of the tears that strained like dammed up sluices in her eyes, to flow. Midas became a little alarmed, for he was conscious, though he never looked at her, what caused the silence.

"Pho, Charity, don't be a fool!—What's the matter with you?—Will you have a glass of bitter ale?—I haven't any wine to offer you, for you know I never drink wine but at home—one gets such wretched stuff!"

Still no reply.

"Or would you like a little water, if you are thirsty, or feel faint? It *is* a dreadfully hot day!—I can easily ring for some water, or, stay, I can bring it. I have some in my washing jug in the next room."

"No, it is only the weather—coming into the cool so suddenly—I shall be better presently," said Charity, and with one convulsive sob she seemed to regain the mastery over herself.

Midas was not humane, he was not tender-hearted, he was not compassionate, but he was cowardly. He both feared, and was irritated by the agony which he knew, in his own heart, he had caused.

"Well, what the devil *is* the matter? What brings you here? Is mother taken ill?—I have told her often she should eat less, and not drink port, but sherry!"

"Your mother is very well, or I should not have left her—I come on my own account—she does not even know I am here!" said Charity, with sudden energy. "You give me no possible opportunity of

speaking with you at home—you shun me —and I—but I am determined to come to some explanation with you!"

"Is that all?—Pho, it is all your own fancy!—My mother's such a blab, I was afraid you had heard of something, though it must all come out some day!—What a foolish girl you are to distress yourself about nothing!—And hunting me up as if I were something that belonged to you, and that you had lost!" said Midas, with mingled confusion and anger.

"At all events, you told me once that I should belong to you—that I should be your wife," replied Charity, very patiently.

"You can't prove it!—I never made any such promise — that I remember!" said Midas, vehemently. "Besides, if I did, no woman cares what promises one makes to another woman, if she causes one to break them."

"I am not come to accuse you, Midas," said Charity, in a low tone—but how full of concentrated sadness! "I have no proof,

as you say—none at least of which I would avail myself. Look only in your own conscience and heart! If they acquit you, so do I. I am only come here to-day to know positively whether you intend to fulfil your promise or not?"

"I deny that I ever made any!" returned Midas, resolutely.

"Do you deny, then, that you ever asked me to be your wife? Be manly and speak out, Midas; let me know your intentions clearly," said Charity, with rising warmth. "You made love to me at a time when perhaps you did not know better, and have since repented the engagement. If so, only say so. I ask but to know the truth."

"That you may bring your paltry action, I suppose, and expose me, as you think?" returned Midas. "You may form your own conclusions; but the only proof against me you have got, is the foolish letter you wheedled out of me when you had managed so artfully to persuade me I really was in love with you, merely because there happened

to be no other young woman that was even passably good-looking about the house!"

"It may be so; but if ever there was a promise of marriage penned, this paper contains one," said Charity, drawing one from her bosom. "Letters could not be expected between two persons who lived in the same house; and as to the wheedling—O, Midas! —But no matter! I never asked you for it: you wrote it, unsolicited, as a proof, you said, that you intended me marriage! Perhaps as a licence for freedoms which you soon found I would not permit—for, God only knows!—perhaps you did never intend to marry me, but merely to disgrace, and turn me forth into the streets!"

"And you want to marry a man whom you represent in so black a light?" returned Midas, fiercely. "But that you never shall. You never shall, I promise you, be wedded to such a rascal!—The truth is, I was a great big fool, and you were another, and frightened me into it by crying and sobbing, and pretending that I had behaved

rudely to you—as if you were such a beauty that people would incur any disgrace and ruin to gain possession of you! Besides, it is such a long time ago,—almost out of the statute of limitations now!—And since then you have done everything in your power to alienate my affections."

"What have I done?" said Charity, with some degree of fierceness, quite out of her natural temper. "But it avails nothing to ask, if they are alienated! Again I tell you, I only want to know decisively and clearly, from your own lips, whether you intend to make me your wife or not?"

"Ladies don't usually pop the question—especially so abruptly," said Midas, with the most provoking nonchalance. "I suppose you think you could recover heavy damages, because my father is rich? But I can tell you, you are quite mistaken. His money is not mine; and besides, I asked Bagshawe, in a cunning way, for an opinion on a similar case; and he told me he had no doubt that the promiser could easily get

off,—that it would appear rather an artful designing trick on your part than anything else! An orphan without a stiver, received into a family out of mere charity—one of the richest in London—and pretend to marry the son of the house! I only wonder at my own stupidity, in being so taken in!"

"Rest assured I shall bring no action," replied Charity Green, with a deep flush of her pale complexion. "You have only to say you do not intend to marry me, and I will surrender to you every species of document I possess. I have them all—presents, papers,—everything in this parcel."

"Have you, though, really?" exclaimed Midas; and, anxious as he was to get rid of his unfortunate betrothed, this seeming readiness to relinquish him offended his mean vanity and egotism. "I suppose you think that you could be much happier without me?—I am such an ugly fellow!—Or, perhaps, there is somebody else you have taken a fancy to?"

"It is far more likely that *you* have taken a fancy to somebody else, Midas!" returned Charity, with much emotion. "And humble and poor as I am, do not think that I would marry a man whose heart and affections were not wholly mine! I even think that yours—if ever they were so—are no longer mine, and therefore I come to restore you to your liberty—but desire to know the plain unvarnished truth."

"What should put such rubbish into your head?" said Midas, with some confusion.

"Your conduct to Mrs. Sparkleton! your visible and marked attentions to her!—your mother's boasting—and moreover the *letter you put into her hand, when you escorted her to her carriage, on the night of the great party!*"

Midas was completely taken aback by the directness and suddenness of this accusation. He had not dreamed that any one—least of all that Charity Green—had observed him.

He was of course highly exasperated, as people mostly are when they are detected.

"So, you keep spies upon me, do you?— Well, make the best of that, too!" he said, with surly defiance in all his tones.

"No, I do not; it was told me by Mr. Bagshawe, who is so proud of you, and of all your doings, and especially of this grand match you are to make."

"Well, I am not accountable to you, nor to any one else!" said Midas, still ferociously. "I am of years of discretion, I should hope! I am my own master, and am acting under advice, and shall make no more replies on the subject."

"But you do not deny it," said Charity, with singular calmness. "That is enough! Do not imagine I am jealous. If I desired revenge, I could not wish more than that you should form a sincere attachment to Mrs. Sparkleton. She will never have you,—of that I am certain; and if she did, she would make you miserable all your life."

"Never have me!—Indeed!—I'll let you see that, since you speak with such insolence," returned Midas, much exasperated. "You think because you once cajoled me into making a foolish offer, which I have done nothing but repent of ever since, that nobody would look upon me but you! You shall see!—Mrs. Sparkleton is a woman that could have any peer of the realm she whistled for—and here is her answer to my communication!"

Midas drew forth his pocket-book, crammed with lucrative documents of every sort,—for he was thoroughly enraged. His self-conceit was wounded to the quick, and he had no longer the least pity on his victim. He selected, from many, a letter—evidently greatly treasured, from its being wrapped in silver tissue paper,—in a lady's hand-writing. Charity extended her hand with convulsive eagerness to take it, but the prudent junior partner in the house of Gullibull and Co. drew it as suddenly back. "No, I thank you; I know what

you want to do!—To tear it to pieces. But I don't value it at that price, and will read it to you, if you please."

Midas actually read to his aghast listener, the following epistle, with "ferry goot actions and discretions," and laying great stress on all the kind and encouraging expressions it contained.

"—— Street, Belgrave Square.

"MY DEAR MR. GULLIBULL,—I can most truly declare, that I am in the highest degree flattered by the obliging preference you announce for me, and that I perceive in the strongest light all the advantages your proposal to unite your destinies with mine offers me. I cannot deny that I hold *all* your excellent family in the highest possible esteem, and that I should be happy to repay their hospitality and kindness of every sort to me, in any manner, but especially in one which you do me the honour to assure me will make the happiness of your whole life. But, my dear Sir, we have not

been long enough acquainted, in my opinion, to enable either of us to form a decisive judgment on so important a question. An exact congeniality of sentiments and ideas is so essential to the happiness of married life, that I should like to ascertain, in a longer experience, whether a momentary partiality or one of a more durable nature animates you. On my part I must confess I see nothing to dislike in your person or manners.

"I am in easy circumstances, as you have been justly informed, so that there is no occasion to hurry myself in so important a point, even if pecuniary considerations ought to enter into such a deliberation. We are neither of us very old as yet. My dear late husband, I must also confess, always behaved so kindly to me, that he has left an impression upon my heart which it will be long before the image of any other can obliterate.

"Without absolutely declining your very flattering proposition, therefore, you must

give me time to deliberate more maturely on the subject. I am very far from wishing that you should consider yourself meanwhile in any manner engaged to me, or under the least obligation to renew your obliging proffer. At the close of the season I shall go to Longacres, and hope by that time to be enabled to give you a more decisive reply. The country is a great place for meditation. Let nothing in the meanwhile interrupt the delightful harmony and pleasant intercourse between our families —the chief charm of my existence. Be assured, moreover, that whatever resolution I form, will be entirely my own. My relations could have no influence with me in forming a decision which must affect myself only, and so intimately.

"Wishing you every prosperity, and with best regards to all your kind family, believe me, my dear Sir, to remain now as ever,—
Very obligedly yours,

"GERALDINE SPARKLETON.

"Midas Gullibull, Esq., Putney.

"P.S. You make an allusion in your note to a nobleman, one of my most intimate and valued friends; but in a manner which I cannot in the slightest degree comprehend. Lord Deville and myself have long since come to an understanding on the subject you seem to hint at. But I shall always appreciate your sister's kindness in removing any uneasiness you might have felt on the matter, though in a mistaken manner, unacquainted as she must necessarily be with all the circumstances. G. S."

"Well, now, what do you say to that? Does that look like encouragement or not?" said Midas, triumphantly folding up the letter.

Charity was silent for one marked moment—filled indeed with unutterable emotion. A wide gulf seemed to yawn between her, and all her past existence, as it might to a cottager separated by the sudden shock of an earthquake from his native

fields. But she made no outbreak—the crash was all within.

"What do I say to that?" she repeated, slowly, and rising. "What do I say to that?—Nothing! That is all I wanted to know—all. You have made a proposal of marriage to another woman; it is nothing to me whether it is accepted or not. Do not imagine that this letter convinces me of anything but your falsehood! Mrs. Sparkleton despises you, and sports with your credulity. I despise you, too, now! —I, the beggar, the orphan, the dependant—I despise you, Mr. Midas Gullibull! —It is over, then. I leave you to enjoy your good fortune, if you can; and that you may have no fear of being disturbed in it, take these papers—examine them—they are all you ever wrote to me, or of me—and burn them all. Here, also, is the emerald brooch you gave me; and now I think I have nothing else of yours."

"Pho, keep it—I never want my presents

back again—And as to these papers, I dare say they are only copies?" said Midas, snatching the parcel rather suddenly, as if he feared she might repent her generosity. A glance convinced him that he held the originals—and even Midas Gullibull was a little moved.

"They really are the things!—Well, Charity, I had far rather we parted friends," he said; "and if you will name what you consider fair damages, I will try and meet your views."

"Damages!—for what? Can you restore me the freshness of my heart, the innocence of my thoughts, my faith in human nature—my folly, if you will?—Come and pay me these damages—when you can. Until then I will accept of nothing—no, not of a morsel of bread to preserve me from starvation! Starvation—poison—the river—anything I prefer to touching one farthing of your blood-money! Keep it for those who need it!" exclaimed Charity Green.

"Don't be a fool, Chary!—get off your nonsensical stilts!" said Midas, alarmed and astonished at this vehemence and energy in a being usually distinguished for the opposite characteristics. "Come!—I'll give you three hundred pounds to settle the dispute between us. Three hundred pounds is a good price for this old rubbish; and I could easily pay it you out of my own money, and no one be ever the wiser about anything. You'll keep it secret for your own sake, you know, for nobody would like to have second-hand goods—and my mother will be sure to give you something when you marry anybody else. I dare say Frank Fuddles, the young attorney I introduced to you, that writes poetry, would be glad to have you, if he knew you had three hundred pounds of your own. I can't give you more—at least at present. This very morning I had a row with my father about money. He don't seem so willing as he used to be that I should have a half partnership; he says he won't have me in controlling him—he

will allow me half profits, but not half partnership, if I marry Mrs. Sparkleton. But he shall!—I know why he won't. This very day—although we expect a large consignment of Pomeranian wheat, hourly—if he hasn't gone on 'Change to lay out forty or fifty thousand pounds on railway scrips; so that if the ships come in before he realizes, we shall be obliged to borrow at four or five per cent.! Isn't he a desperate old fool?—and Mrs. Sparkleton seems tarred with the same stick—but only let me get my finger in the pie!"

"God forgive me for having loved this man!—and you, Midas, for the profanation of thinking that you could love!" ejaculated Charity Green. "Serve your god, your demon—Gold! and we shall see how he will repay you—but do not fear that I shall require three hundred pounds, or three pence from you at any time! Henceforth, as I have said, I would not take a bite of bread from your hand if I were famishing!"

"It is all very fine, Mrs. Ferguson!—you will live upon my father and mother, and then pretend you take nothing of mine!—But you'll be glad perhaps even of threepence some day—and whenever you do, I'll pay you the three hundred pounds, and you can begin counting interest from this day."

"I shall need it only when I buy Mr. Fuddles!—I will come for it then, and not till then—interest and all!" replied Charity, with a strange laugh.

"Well, don't go on like a madwoman, but let me see you into a Putney omnibus, and go home at once—you are not fit to be out by yourself! I never saw anybody less up to this world than you are! You are only fit for a nunnery, and if I were you I would go into one. Lots of protestant ladies do now-a-days, that find themselves out to be too silly to live among people," said Midas. "But, however, I am glad this explanation is over, for I really cannot marry you—and I am bound in honour to

consider myself engaged to the honourable Mrs. Sparkleton."

"Good bye, then, Sir; I am not going direct to Putney; so you need not trouble yourself to show me to an omnibus," said Charity, a little wildly perhaps. "Three hundred pounds for a human heart!—There are the papers—burn them! No human eye has ever seen them but mine and yours—and if true copies are kept above, it is not my fault."

Midas was considerably alarmed. He was so well aware of his own perfections, that he did not think it at all improbable a woman who had lost them might attempt to commit suicide!

"I would rather see you to the omnibus—at least let Rustisaw," he said, with some perturbation.

"No, neither of you!—I told your mother when I came out, that I intended to call upon a friend in one of the bazaars—and I must, or she will wonder where I have been," replied Charity, with wonderful calm-

ness. "I have still a friend, you see, in the world. I am not so well off yet as my father, who boasted when he died, that he had not one!"

Midas did not wish to show too much apprehension either—and at this moment Rustisaw looked in with a preconcerted "Two gentlemen waiting to speak to you, sir, in your office."

"Then I must wish you good bye, Chary," he said, extending his hand, in a kind, cousin-like manner. "Good bye — take care of yourself—and get home as fast as you can."

"Good bye!" said Charity—and they parted with little other ceremony than the most casual acquaintances that part for a day.

Midas wished her a pleasant journey home, and politely saw her to the bottom of the stairs, in a literal sense, by looking after her over the balustrades. He had, however, the vanity or kindness to request Rustisaw to follow her at a little distance,

to see that she took the right way, and took the right omnibus.

Mr. Rustisaw perceived that something was wrong; but as his fears always travelled in one direction, he only exclaimed, "All right on 'Change, I hope, sir?—no ill news about the rails?"

"Why, Rustisaw, do you think my mother ever troubles her head about such matters, or would send a girl to me about things of that sort?" returned Midas, peevishly. "Some trifling commission in the city, that's all—But Miss Green knows nothing of town, and is quite as likely to go towards London Bridge as to the omnibus!—What a cursed thing it is," he continued, mentally, as Rustisaw hastened down on his mission, "that because one takes a moment's liking for a woman she thinks she acquires a right to torment one all the rest of one's life! It's the most unjust thing that ever was, that a lanky dowdy like that should really imagine I ever meant to fasten myself to her for life—especially when I

can get the most fashionable and handsome woman in London for the asking!—I suppose she'll turn methodist now, and get one of their parsons—she was always a little that way!—and so she may, for anything I care!"

CHAPTER XI.

MEANWHILE Charity departed with a brisk, firm step. Something seemed to steel her internally—to give lightness and elasticity to her tread. She seemed to herself to move along as people sometimes do in dreams—on air. In fact, she felt a strange sensation of freedom; a load was lifted, as it were, from her soul. A passer-by would have said she had just learned some very joyful intelligence. And so she had. It is less painful to know the worst, than to dread it. But more than that: Charity had, almost from the beginning of their correspondence, despised herself for loving Midas, and submitting to his tyrannical

domination. She was freed for ever now from that slavery.

She went too fast for Rustisaw to ascertain which way she had gone; and while he was still looking for her in two directions at once, she was pretty far on her way towards the bazaar, where she had informed Mrs. Gullibull she intended to make a call. Alighting at the fashionable thoroughfare which led to it, Charity was rather surprised, but no longer perturbed, to observe the multitudes of glittering equipages which passed, and the crowds of people moving in the street. But she soon discerned the cause, and in a rather remarkable manner. A very fine equipage nearly drove over her at the corner of Bond-street, and happening to glance into it, as she retreated on the curb-stone, she perceived a lady in white plumes and court-dress, of the most superb materials, in it, whom she recognised instantly to be Mrs. Sparkleton. So she concluded it was some gala day at St. James's.

Charity entered the bazaar, and found herself in a few instants threading the mazes of one of those vast toy-shops, in which the luxury of the age exhausts itself on elegant frivolities. Everything was glittering, neat, and trifling; the scents of fine woods, used in a million varieties of tasteful nicknacks, saluted her olfactories; wildernesses of children's playthings, gilded drums, accordions, hoops, cedar paint-boxes, bracelets, bead-purses, Berlin work and parti-coloured wools, pretty-coloured child's story-books, and large alphabets; laces, tin swords and tin helmets, boxes of wooden trees, and cows, and canals, and Dutch houses; unnumbered dolls of ideal beauty, far surpassing the most brilliant assemblage of the belles and beaux of a season, in the most diversified costumes; little sailors, little soldiers, little coquettes, little Swiss girls, little Taglionis—the world in miniature; knives, scissors, thimbles, in their beauteous velvet cases; work-boxes, in inexhaustible profusion; pin-cushions, musical

boxes, desks, slates, jewels, showy costumes for children; cakes, ices, creams—a chaos of every imaginable toy and grotesque or beautiful fancy was around her. She took but little heed, however, of any of these seductive objects; but, threading her way through a maze of glittering counters, she arrived at a somewhat secluded one, set out with baby-linen of extraordinary neatness, and elegance of cut and finish.

In a little square compartment, in the middle of this display, a middle-aged woman sate at work; at least she would have been called so in common parlance, though we imagine that very few women live to be ninety; and the fewer the better. About forty-five she probably was, and in her youth she had evidently been a very handsome woman. Her features were of a superior order, her complexion extremely fair, and her hair was still of a fine glossy black. She seemed conscious of this fact, and wore it without a cap, curled very elaborately in the innumerable little ring-

lets fashionable a long time ago. She was undoubtedly an old maid—no one would have turned an inquiring glance from her face to her finger—but an old maid of the best sort. A kind of nunnish old maid, with a benevolent tranquillity of countenance; not at all lean, but rather plump; smooth, clear, and unwrinkled in her skin; bearing evidence in every aspect of a peaceful, or at least resigned and gentle temperament. Yet Miss Dishnap—that was her name—and it appeared fearlessly emblazoned in gold letters on a black velvet board over her head—Miss Dishnap, like all the old maids in the world, had had her disappointment. Heaven, in its goodness, assigns at least this portion to the most neglected of the sex—that they can all boast of at least a disappointment. But Miss Dishnap's was a real, vital, life-lasting one.

Charity had often heard the story from her mother, and gathered many affecting details in the conversations which the two

friends used frequently to interchange on the subject; for they were acquaintances of many years standing, and knew the vicissitudes of one another's lives familiarly as each her own. Mrs. Green well remembered the talented, enthusiastic, and high-spirited young surgeon, the betrothed husband of her friend's youth, the delight of all who knew him, and the idol of the warm and affectionate heart which continued to cherish his memory as freshly and lovingly, during twenty years of maiden widowhood, as if it had been continually revived by the presence and tenderness of its object. Often had the tears come to Charity's childish eyes, hearing Miss Dishnap relate anecdotes of her departed lover's generosity and kindness of disposition, his daring and aspiring character, his truth, his courage, his gaiety of heart, that laughed at fate and mischance as at powerless things! They were plighted to be wedded as soon as the lover could possibly keep a wife in any comfort; for Miss Dishnap's

family, very wisely, insisted on this as a preliminary. The young surgeon was rapidly rising in his profession, and in the public esteem; the longed-for union seemed at hand—but a destructive pestilence was nearer! Daring everything in the hope to distinguish himself in his profession, and accelerate the happiness he expected, the young surgeon fell a victim to the cholera which ravaged Europe in 1832. An eternal farewell, hastily scribbled by a dying hand, in which love still defied death to conquer him, was the sole memento which six hours left to a long life of enduring regret.

Further misfortunes in her own family had reduced Miss Dislinap to depend upon her needle for subsistence; and she employed it, as in a labour of love, in the curious embroidery and manufactory of infantile garments of various kinds. Charity's mother had been very skilful in the same art, and thence an intimacy began which was continued down to the former's death. A true

friend in distress, a generous, faithful, never-wearied one, both the widow and orphan had found in Miss Dishnap. The wise in this world will smile contemptuously to hear that the poor woman was once or twice on the very brink of a tiny bankruptcy, through sacrifices made in preserving her friend from something very like starvation.

Charity remembered that she was formerly a very great favourite with Miss Dishnap. She knew, indeed, that it could not be otherwise, for Miss Dishnap used often to relate, that when Charity was a baby, her young lover (for young he had died, and young he continued in her memory to the last) had often taken her in his arms, dandled and caressed her, and said laughing merry things about children—how he loved them, and how he would have a dozen of his own before he died; Charity had thus acquired a portion of the undying love and recollection which encircled everything her ill-fated lover had ever said or

done, in the heart of Margaret Dishnap. It seemed as if some part of him had not perished—in this connexion of a living link between poor Richard Smithers and time—that Charity's bare existence deprived that beautiful past of its else too mythic and visionary lines through the clouds of years.

But Charity had reason to apprehend that Miss Dishnap might be offended with what would certainly appear to her a degree of ungrateful neglect. The former was indeed so shocked with a reception once accorded to her plainly garbed friend, by her uncle Gullibull's pampered menials, when she had ventured to make her a visit at his mansion, that she had never since had the courage to attempt to renew the acquaintance. But "sorrow maketh his owner stout," and Charity saluted her former friend without much outward visible sign of trepidation, by stretching her hand over the counter, and asking her, pretty firmly, how she did?

Miss Dishnap was apparently buried, mind and eye, in braiding a little scarlet coat into a fanciful pattern; in reality her thoughts were wandering in a crowded graveyard of the outskirts of London, or pausing near a peculiar green mound, trimly kept with holly and flowers, planted by some assiduous hand, so as to bloom all the year round—even in winter—which needed no costly entablature to mark it out to the eyes of love. She was musing how it looked by night when the stars were shining over it. For she was certain they shone specially over it, with a benign and eternal sadness of brightness. Charity's voice startled her from this contemplation; but the poor girl was very glad to see that although she looked surprised, she looked extremely pleased when she recognised the speaker. She opened her little enclosure instantly, and invited her in, with a pleasant smile and shake of the hand, and a kind "Who *would* have thought of seeing you?" that went to Charity's heart.

"But will she be so kind when she knows my reason for coming to see her?" she thought, hesitatingly. "Yet she was always kindest when we most needed kindness!—and when did I need it more?—No, not when poor mother died!"

To be direct and honest was Charity's chief skill in life or in conversation, and she came to her point with very little preparation.

"I dare say you are surprised to see me," she said, taking one of two high stools built to command a view of the entire stall when its guardian was seated at needlework. "I dare say you think me very ungrateful, too. But I should have come to see you often, only my aunt did not like my going out alone, and she would not come with me. But I am going to leave her now, and I shall have more time for my own friends."

"What do you mean, my little precious?" (that was the name Richard had always bestowed on the baby, Charity). "And

how ill you look! Have you quarrelled with your aunt? I could not have thought that of you, that were so good-natured and quiet a little thing from your cradle!"

"No; but I *shall* quarrel with her, I think; at least I shall leave her: I am not happy—I am tired of dependence! But I will tell you all some day—I am very, very wretched there! I mean to leave the house directly, and to live on my own earnings!"

"What, leave all those rich people—that grand house! But all is not exactly what it seems, that's true! Yet how could you live by your own earnings? You must be spoilt for a hard life now, Charity?"

"No, I am not; I mean to live by making lace. I can make very beautiful lace," said Charity, without the slightest tinge of egotistical vanity in the statement. "And that is why I have come to see you this evening. I have often heard you tell my mother how heavy the rent of your stall is, and of the small house you have at Bromp-

ton, for you always said you could not bear to live in lodgings. Lace don't take up much room! *Do* let me have a part of your stand to show it for sale, and I'll board with you, and pay half the rent and half everything!"

"You!—why, do you know what it comes to? At least to seventeen or eighteen shillings a week!" exclaimed Miss Dishnap.

"But it will be much lighter when there are two of us; and I shall be sure and pay," said Charity, with great earnestness. "I have seven or eight pounds of my own, already; at least I can get it when I leave, for our furniture and things sold for that, and Mrs. Gullibull has the money. I have some veils and collars ready worked, and I have often seen my aunt give four or five guineas for much worse ones, merely because she was told they came from Valenciennes. I know you may think I have not very good principle, because I did not pay you the fifteen shillings we owed you when my

mother died; but I was ashamed to pay you so little for all your goodness. I thought—but no matter—I have it here now." And she put her hand in her pocket, or intended to do so, but drew it back aghast from a small piece of ragged lining which remained to attest that it had been cut away by a thievish pair of scissors.

Miss Dishnap could not refrain from laughing a little at this exposure of Charity's fitness to encounter the world. But she easily perceived that a more than common cause was at work to produce so energetic a determination in a mind by nature tractable and submissive. She inquired, and soon learned sufficient to excite her sympathy to a very great degree, although she could not ascertain the exact particulars of Charity's reasons to be discontented with her asylum and protectors.

"Well, you must have been served badly indeed," she said, after awhile, "if you would rather come and drudge your eyes

out here at needlework than live with your grand relations!"

"Anything—I would starve rather than live to be insulted the way I am by them!" replied Charity, with vehemence. "I feel myself in a sort of Iceland with them; everything glittering and cold about me! If I have nothing else, I shall have a free and independent soul! You cannot tell how I long for a little quiet and silence; it will be like living amidst green fields to be with you here! Do let me live with you! You must often feel lonely—sometimes perhaps you are ill. I am sure I could be of service to you at times. Our two lonelinesses together will make a company, and poor Richard Smithers will be with us too, for you have often said the very sight of me brought him as clearly back to your memory as if he was present!"

This last appeal was too much for Miss Dishnap, and her voice was much thicker than usual as she replied, "I know you are a good, kind girl, and must have

been very unkindly treated to drive you to this resolution. I don't advise anything, for I know what a hard struggle you will have of it. But if you make up your mind to leave Putney, you may come to me without a penny, as welcome as if you came with a thousand pounds!"

With this understanding, and much more to the same purpose, Charity took her farewell, and retraced her way homeward with a lightened heart. On her return, she declared herself so tired with the day's excursion that she begged her aunt's leave to go to bed without waiting the arrival of the rest of the family. She usually breakfasted by herself early in the morning, so Mrs. Gullibull did not miss her on the following day until the Alderman and Midas had gone to the city, when she rung her bell, and told the servant who attended, to send Miss Green—she wanted her to do something about the plants.

Miss Green accordingly arrived, but, to her aunt's great surprise and displeasure,

again in out-of-door costume. "Come, Charity, I can't quite stand this; you can't go a pleasuring every day, or you will soon not be worth your salt."

"I never was worth my salt, aunt, in this house—but I am going to leave it," replied Charity, with tears gushing to her eyes. "I only came to wish you good-bye, ma'am; I am going to earn my own living."

If Mrs. Gullibull had seen the roof of the breakfast parlour begin crumbling in, she could scarcely have been more surprised, and indeed alarmed. "Why, Charity, you're gone mad! What do you mean?"

"What I say, ma'am; I am going to leave your house. I do not want to live on alms any longer. I see I am in the way —I want to be alone."

"You want to be in a strait jacket, I think!" exclaimed Mrs. Gullibull, staring in wonder at the phenomenon of her niece speaking aloud and with resolution. "What the deuce is the matter with the girl? I never saw you in such a taking before,

child! I didn't think it was in her! Has any one offended you? I know Murphie is sometimes a little impudent to you—it's the way with that sort of people where they think they can. I am sure I have suffered more with servants than enough, myself! But I'll tell her to do so any more at her peril; so get out of your airs, and come and help me to pluck the withered leaves in the conservatory. Or you might do it yourself, for I'm not so active as I used to be, and young people are the fittest for work."

"Murphie has not offended me, aunt; she sees that I am little thought of, and she is not to blame—not much to blame—if she treats me with disrespect."

"Then, pray, is it me? Have I offended you, Miss Pompey the Great?" returned Mrs. Gullibull. "Well, pray what have I done? You can't expect to sit all day without stirring a joint, as if you were nailed to the chair; and I am sure it is more for the benefit of your health than any advantage

to myself that I ask you to do little trifles for me."

"I do not complain of anything of that sort; I am only too happy when I can do anything for you or for my kind uncle," said Charity, and paused with a swelling heart.

"Then what the deuce do you complain of?" responded Mrs. Gullibull, turning somewhat ruddy, and looking as if she had no occasion to ask the question. "One would think you had been gobbled up alive like an oyster, or baked in your own juice as they are, poor things, for supper!"

"Your—your son, ma'am, and I—don't agree! We don't agree, and can't, and never shall!" said Charity. "I know he will be glad to be rid of me—and he shall be rid of me!"

"Well! now the murder's out, we'll make it all right!" replied Mrs. Gullibull, in a conciliatory, even coaxing, tone. "He told me all about it himself, poor, dear fellow! He feels for you quite as much as

you can for yourself, for he's a generous good fellow as ever stepped in shoe-leather, is Midas! But you are not the first young woman that has fallen in love with a nice young man, through seeing him constantly, without his ever having any thoughts of her. Lord bless you, child, very few of us women ever marry those we should like best; we must take what we can get, in general. I'm no exception myself; not that I was ever in love with anybody but your uncle, but what I mean is, I was not in love with him when I married him. It was the best offer I had at the time—that's all. Now, you can't get Midas, of course, because he only likes you as a relation—nothing more—and he's as good as engaged to the Honourable Mrs. Sparkleton, and she's every thing that one could wish—lots of money, a duke's granddaughter, and all! Pho, don't be silly, Charity; I'll take care you see very little of him till it's all over, and then of course you can't have any liking for another woman's husband, and must

make up your mind and do as other people do. Come, come, it's no secret; he told me all about it last night; how you visited him yesterday, and told him you were so fond of him you couldn't live without him! And that's the reason why you went to bed so early. No wonder you were ashamed to face him when you found you couldn't have him, and that all his little attentions were only out of pity for a poor young orphan!"

Charity thought she was prepared for every ill that fate might yet have in store for her; but she was not prepared for this disgrace, this overflowing measure of humiliation. Her quiet nature was stirred to its depths by indignation, and she exclaimed, with a passionate vehemence which startled Mrs. Gullibull, as she herself expressed it, "almost out of her skin"—

"Did he tell you so? Why, then, he told you a base unmanly lie; and he is a false, perfidious, shameless vagabond!"

"Don't abuse my son, Miss! Keep a

civil tongue in your head; you'll find it more to your interest!" exclaimed the agitated mother, in return.

"I despise my interest; I abhor my interest! I tell you, Mrs. Gullibull, your son has falsely belied me!" continued Charity. "I never courted him; I never sued to him; I never asked him to marry me, save that I demanded of him to fulfil a promise he had made to me, without any intreaty on my part—even against my will. And he refused—and therefore he is a forsworn, dastardly liar!"

"My goodness!—here's a Billingsgate wench, and no mistake! But it's no wonder; you were brought up to a pretty purpose in the slums! I don't believe a word of it!" said Mrs. Gullibull, vigorously. "I'd believe my own son much sooner than you; and he says you were always after him, teasing him to fall in love with you, till he was obliged to say plain—No! Do you mean for to say, that if my son had courted you, you would have kept it a secret from

everybody, and wouldn't have been proud and vain of it everywhere? Would you have stood what you have in this house, from everybody and the servants, if you had been engaged to him?"

"I was wrong in that, I own; but he told me you would never approve of such an alliance, and I—I believed him!"

"Then you are rightly served for your pains, trying to deceive me and the family!" retorted Mrs. Gullibull. "What right had you to try and marry a rich young man, that hadn't a penny to bless yourself with? You are a most ungrateful hussy; and whatever befals you, you have brought it all on your own head!"

"On my head let it fall, then!—I may be starved, but I mean to earn either my own life or my own death!" replied Charity.

"Well, but, my girl, what do you mean to do?" said Mrs. Gullibull, troubled in conscience, and affected, in spite of her own pretended wrongs. "Don't do anything

desperate—now don'tee!—Don't think of suicide! It's the most horrid death you can die."

"Suicide!" returned Charity, with an expression of scorn. "No, aunt; if I had the wickedness to commit suicide, I have not the folly to do it for a wretch so unworthy! Do not be alarmed on that account!—I have taken a share in a stand at a bazaar, with an old friend of my mother's, and I am going to board and live with her."

Mrs. Gullibull was almost as much shocked at this idea; a relative of her's to keep a stall in a bazaar! she actually burst into tears! "How can you be such a mean-spirited wretch as to think of such a thing, Charity? You'll break my heart!—and that is all the reward I am to get for taking compassion on you, and treating you like my own child, till you are old enough to show the cloven foot, and sting the bosom that warmed you!"

"Do you think I will stay here—that I

can stay here—that I ought to stay here, to see him courting a fine lady, who only laughs at him—to hear his falsehoods of me—to meet his contemptuous smiles?" said Charity, but not unmoved with Mrs. Gullibull's appeal. The latter lady's indignation was, however, now roused in turn.

"Laughs at him, indeed!—laughs at my son, Gullibull junior, of Allthrift Court! I should rather think not! It's all your mean jealousy and spite! I should be *ashamed*, if I was you, to show it! But your father was just such another; always stood in his own light—never knew, to his dying day, on which side his bread was buttered!"

"Do not speak ill of my father; he is dead; he cannot defend himself! But your own sense must tell you, aunt, I cannot stay—I must go."

"You shall go then to Ramsgate or Brighton, till it's over; the sea-air will do you good, and give you a little colour," said Mrs. Gullibull, coaxingly. "I'll pay

for you, and then you can come back, and everything will be all right again. Come, Charity, you are not an obstinate girl naturally! Here's ten pounds, and you shall have a nice new silk frock, and everything else you want."

"I only want the eight pounds my mother's furniture sold for; that is all; I want no more!" said Charity, rejecting this golden salve with a gesture of disdain.

"The most impertinent creature I ever met with!" returned Mrs. Gullibull, out of all patience. "Do you mean to tell me her funeral did not come to much more? Wasn't there a hearse and two mourning coaches? Did I bury her like a pauper, or in a shillibeer?"

"No!" returned Charity, with indescribable bitterness. "No!—we had so grand a funeral, that people wondered how she came to die of want and despair!"

"Then all I can say, is—of course you're your own mistress, and can do as you please, but if you leave my house in this unaccount-

able, unprotected manner, you shall never set foot in it again, and shan't have a single farthing of mine to keep you from the streets!" said Mrs. Gullibull, irritated out of all bounds.

"You will allow my boxes to be sent after me? I have tied them up and directed them," was Charity's reply.

"I should like to know where, then? I suppose some fellow's got hold of her, and she will be ruined. Where are you going to, Miss? I insist upon knowing!"

"To Miss Dishnap's, No. 4, Placid Prospect, Brompton. I have put the direction on the boxes," said Charity, calmly.

"Miss Dishnap's, indeed!—what is she? One of those fine old ladies who take compassion on young girls out of place and in distress, I suppose?"

Now Mrs. Gullibull knew very well who Miss Dishnap was; had known her in former times, before it was beneath her to be cognizant of the existence of such people, as a very respectable woman.

"Whoever she is," replied Charity, firmly, "I mean to put myself under her protection; and I have come, aunt, to part kindly, if you please—but certainly to part!"

"If you do go and sit in a bazaar to be stared at by fellows, and disgrace the family by keeping a baby-linen stall, I'll never speak to you again, nor own you, nor look at you, Miss Green!"

"I do not want patronage. Good morning, aunt," said Miss Green. "Keep the eight pounds in part payment of my mother's funeral. Murphie will see my boxes to the carrier's with pleasure, I do not doubt."

"Go, then, ungrateful, obstinate creature!" said Mrs. Gullibull. "Don't think I mean to break my heart about it. It's one comfort that your name is Green, and you can't disgrace the Gullibulls by your conduct. I shan't fling my shoe after you, for I'm as certain as I live, such ingratitude must bring down its own punishment, wherever you go!"

Charity departed; and, after a long deliberation with herself, Mrs. Gullibull came to the conclusion that, on the whole, perhaps it might be as well that she should leave the house until after her son's marriage. Mrs. Gullibull was by no means so convinced, as she had laboured to appear, that matters were as her son represented them. Charity might throw serious obstacles in the way of the splendid alliance in view. Mrs. Sparkleton herself might take offence if she learned anything to the disadvantage of her wooer. Meanwhile, Charity would have a taste of poverty—would have tried herself in the battle of life, where so few come off victors, and be glad to accept again of her old asylum. Mrs. Gullibull felt she should want her—want somebody to keep her company, to study her caprices, to attend her in her visits and drives without being obtrusive, or requiring to be invited wherever she was herself.

She sent Charity her boxes, therefore, or at least suffered Murphie to send them, and

meant to have sent her a twenty pound note besides, only she was disgusted with an additional piece of misconduct on the part of Charity. In the course of the day, Lady Fitzhauton arrived at her mother's house, quite in a passion, to learn if it was really true that Miss Green had left the house, "for, if not, she really ought to be turned out!"

"What do you think, mamma, she had the impudence to do? She came to my house under pretence of wishing me good bye, though I believe she only wanted me to get her back again, now that her fit of impertinence must be pretty well over. And though I had given express orders that I did not wish to see any one, she insisted on coming in, and annoyed me for a long time because she would neither say what she wanted nor go away. And at last, merely because Lord Deville happened to be there when she came, and said some civil things to me before he went (and he was quite driven away by her absurd behaviour in

stopping so), she had the assurance to *warn* me, as she called it, against his lordship! and called him a designing man, and said she saw plainly he had a design upon me! merely because he praised my looks in that blue satin, you know, mamma, and said I looked exactly like Hebe when she first put on the mantle of the skies, or some nonsense like that. And because he asked leave to come again next day and bring me a little King Charles' dog, for he knows I am fond of them, and it is smaller than Mrs. Sparkleton's, which she is always boasting of! And besides that, she had the insolence to tell me that I did not behave properly to my husband—as if a girl that is certain to be an old maid could know that!—and that I ought to study his humours, and never talk of my money—as if he never talked of his ancestors!—and as if a woman ought to be a complete slave to her husband! And now I am sure you are right in what you say about her being in love with Midas, for I am sure she is jealous of him,—and

tried to set me against Mrs. Sparkleton—saying she was only making a fool of him; and she tried to make me jealous, too—saying, that she was sure she was after Fitzhauton, and that Fitzhauton paid her too much attention!—as if Mrs. Sparkleton was such a beauty that no one could be compared with her, and that she could take anybody's husband or sweetheart from them she thought proper! I soon let her know I didn't care for all the Mrs. Sparkletons in the world; that I could even get people from *her* that she thought she had made quite sure of! Though Mrs. Sparkleton is really a shameful kind of woman, and such a coquette that I believe she would not mind even trying to entice papa! But I know that I have only to be a little kind and coaxing to Fitzhauton, and he'll never even look at her again, except to show his contempt!"

"Pho, my dear, it's only Mrs. Sparkleton's way; I'm not a bit jealous, you see," said Mrs. Gullibull. "Great ladies have

that way always; and your brother will soon take the nonsense out of her, when once she becomes his wife. But who would have thought the creature was such a mischief-maker, trying to set you and that dear lady by the ears, when you ought to agree like sisters!"

"Oh, but, mamma, I always knew she was a very sly creature, though she sate as prim and silent always as a piece of worsted work!"

"Ay, as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth!—But what did you say?"

"I told her I thought she was the most impudent woman I ever knew! that it was the height of impudence to pretend there was anything wrong between Lord Deville and me! That I did not care for all the Mrs. Sparkletons in the world; and I begged only, since she was determined to disgrace herself, that she would have the goodness never to pretend to be any relation of ours."

In short, Charity Green's advice had

shared the fate of most of the sincere advice given in the world since the time of Cassandra. It had offended the persons whom it was intended to serve, and strengthened them in their resolutions to persevere in their own fancies. Lady Fitzhauton was too self-conceited, obstinate, and vain, to attend to warnings either on her own conduct or against the designs of others. Yet Charity had given very good and sensible counsel, indeed; for, as bystanders are said to see more of the game than the players, so had she. She suspected alike the designs of Deville, and the inconsiderate vivacity of Mrs. Sparkleton. But her reward for telling unpleasant truths was simply scorn and anger. Mrs. Gullibull replaced the twenty pound note in her purse, to be laid out on the next splendid trifle which caught her attention; and Lady Fitzhauton gave orders that if Miss Green called at her house, she was to be uniformly denied to her.

In the evening, when the alderman was

informed of the revolution that had happened in his family, the tidings were so judiciously seasoned, or he was so much taken up with other matters, that he did not express the disapprobation which Mrs. Gullibufil herself somewhat dreaded he would have evinced. In fact, when he was informed that Charity was so distressingly in love with Midas, she made herself quite ridiculous before every one; when he heard that she had behaved with the most extraordinary insolence to her aunt, because she would not, and could not, promise to break off the match with Mrs. Sparkleton; when he heard that she had even uttered wicked insinuations against the character of his daughter, and endeavoured to make mischief between her and her husband; the worthy alderman could not be very much blamed if he acquiesced in his wife's opinion that she knew best how to deal with such an obstinate creature; that it was proper to give her rope enough; to let her take her full swing; and other figurative ex-

pressions, denoting that it was advisable to leave Charity to the effects of her own misconduct, that she might learn to repent of it.

But besides all the wisdom expended in the course of a long dissertation on the subject with which Mrs. Gullibull deprived her spouse of half his night's rest, the alderman was so greatly harassed and surprised with the sudden fall of prices in a railroad in which he was largely concerned, that he lost the rest of his slumbers on his own account. He had therefore but little time to devote to the consideration of Charity Green's case, and only determined to do something in it as soon as ever he had a little leisure to attend to domestic affairs. Meanwhile, if she really was in love with Midas, (which even his father did not imagine to be very probable) she would have leisure to repent her folly.

CHAPTER XII.

It may be truly said, that there are no disappointments so complete as those we receive from attaining our objects. Mrs. Sparkleton's was a case in point. A very short period indeed seemed to put her in possession of the things she had apparently devoted herself to acquire; but we doubt very much if a failure in all of them would have brought her half so much embarrassment and inconvenience.

There was Lord Fitzhauton: he was certainly much more attached and ardent in his feelings towards her than in the warmest phase of their Parisian flirtation. In fact, he was really, or imagined himself to be so,

most passionately in love. Her wounded pride and tenderness might be considered, one would think gratified, as far as need be, by the submission and devotion of the wayward and haughty young nobleman. Her resentment against the affronting wife ought to have been satiated, or at least soothed, by the desertion and contempt into which she had fallen with Fitzhauton. At the same time, more effectually to conceal his ulterior projects, Lord Deville afforded Mrs. Sparkleton less and less ambiguous proofs of attachment in public. Every one thought, at last, that it would be a match between them, until the appearance of Midas Gullibull in the lady's train, reports of his vast wealth, and the distinction with which he was treated, rather balanced opinion. Still Mrs. Sparkleton was at the height of her glory, surrounded by such a blaze of homage —one would have thought.

It could not be doubted she had effected the entire conquest of Midas Gullibull. Never did man devote himself more earnestly,

and we may add, *sotto voce*, less successfully, than Midas to win the heart of his lady-love. He did everything that ever he had heard of lovers doing, to fix the brilliant widow. He dressed more exquisitely superfine than ever: he wore handsomer waistcoats; his shirt studs were even more splendid than of yore; his boots tighter; he wore gloves night and day, and used a world of perfume to make his hands smooth and white. He sent numerous and very valuable, if not very tasteful, presents to his intended. In vain she refused them. She had at least half a dozen gold watches, but he insisted on making her a gift of a seventh, to which he affixed so massive a chain that Mrs. Sparkleton easily discovered it was his mother's—for she had often wondered how any neck could willingly bear such a weight of metal. She sent it back, with her best thanks, twice; and still he returned it, with the startling information that he meant all his mother's jewels to be hers.

"I have no claim to them, my dear sir," Mrs. Sparkleton replied, with bland politeness; "and if I had, should not think of accepting what would so much more naturally and properly descend to your sister."

Midas even made the lady and himself considerably ridiculous by alarming her whole neighbourhood on a morning which he understood to be her birthday, with the apparition of a complete band of music beneath her windows, to awaken her from her slumbers on the auspicious day. He had heard of some such custom prevailing at court, and imagined it would be a most agreeable and flattering attention. But Mrs. Sparkleton, who had hardly laid down to rest from the fatigue of a ball, was excessively annoyed with this importunate harmony, and the more so when she learned the reason of its persevering attentions to her house. Moreover, it was *not* her birthday; Midas had mistaken the date she gave, or else she had purposely misled him, not dreaming of consequences.

Besides all this domestic success, Mrs. Sparkleton's fortunes were apparently elevated by successful speculation to the most exalted pitch of prosperity. The railway bubble was at this period expanded to its fullest size, and glowing with its most splendidly golden hues. Mrs. Sparkleton was a shareholder in more companies than she even knew the name of—placed there by the disinterested friendship of Humson and Gullibull. She was continually engaged in transactions on 'Change of which she had not the faintest idea; these zealous friends managed all her transactions for her. She sold out and bought in, transferred, speculated in entirely new lines—until at last, for the trifling sum of fourteen thousand pounds, paid in actual cash, she found herself in possession of scrip, debentures, and securities to the value, she was informed, of nearly ten times that amount!

Enormous as this profit appeared even to her sanguine self, Mrs. Sparkleton lent a ready ear to the assurances of her mer-

cantile friends, that it would be greatly increased if she only "held on,"—perhaps doubled! The shares in her lines continued steadily to rise in value. Besides, the alderman was obliged to confess, that she could not realise, even if she was so foolish as to desire to do so, at that particular juncture. He had borrowed some of the money, to extend her transactions so enormously, from the railway companies in which she had embarked. But the directors only allowed themselves the privilege of borrowing without giving security. Mrs. Sparkleton's venture, as well as eighty thousand pounds of his own, were accordingly locked up in the coffers of the Grand Middle-Diddle Company, as security for the repayment of the sums borrowed to purchase more of their stock, and so raise it to a false value and demand. Lawless was a director, and had as much as he liked without any such unnecessary precaution; and we have heard he has since boasted, sitting in rags and mugging himself with

small beer in a pot-house in Whitechapel, that more than a million and a-half of stock at one period belonged to him — on paper. On the strength of this vast possibility, he took a splendid country villa, kept four or five horses, an opera girl, and a large establishment—until the day the bubble broke.

Mrs. Sparkleton also conceived herself at liberty to live up to the magnificence of her futurity. Her expenses increased hourly, in nearly equal ratio with the difficulty of supplying them. What mattered it to her that she became daily more and more involved? At any time she had only to sell out to pay all she owed, and be fifty or sixty thousand pounds in pocket. She told every one so that was at all importunate; and such was the effect of her beauty, affability, and the renown of her conquests, that every one believed her, and waited patiently till it should please her to pay.

All these advantages had, however, as

we have hinted, their drawbacks. With regard to Lord Fitzhauton, even, it cannot be denied that Mrs. Sparkleton was pleased with the passion she had rekindled—that she triumphed in the victory she had obtained over a rival who had taken so much pains to defy and affront her. But Mrs. Sparkleton was not destitute of moral feeling and convictions; she had pride, and a very great regard for her reputation. She regarded the latter, perhaps—we are afraid we must own—as of more importance than the imaginary thing of which it is the phantom symbol, called in ancient writers virtue. She felt that the impetuosity and reckless selfishness of her admirer put all these articles in great jeopardy. She was still on the most friendly terms in the world with Lady Fitzhauton; but she perceived very plainly that her ladyship suspected and detested her. Mrs. Clackmannan—the dreadful Mrs. Clackmannan—had begun to take notice how often Lord Fitzhauton's barouche was at Mrs. Sparkle-

ton's door. This fact was certain, for Mrs. Clackmannan's footman had received instructions to ascertain whose it was, couched in the form of a kind hope from his mistress that it was not a doctor's—that Mrs. Sparkleton was not seriously indisposed, since it came so often?

We believe, too, that whenever her irritation against Lady Fitzhauton cooled down, Mrs. Sparkleton's conscience was a little troubled at the possible consequences to the foolish and headstrong wife. Lady Fitzhauton really seemed as if she headed a conspiracy against herself! The more she perceived her husband's affections alienated, the more she laboured to increase the causes of his discontent, by her haughtiness, her ill humour, and petulant jealousies. The secret insinuations and cajoleries of Deville contributed of course not a little to this result, by increasing the vanity and self-confidence of their object. Still Mrs. Sparkleton felt many untoward qualms of compassion at the probable fate of her rival, even though she

knew that it might possibly be so managed as to effect the grand purpose of her own dreams. She would have been very content indeed if this could be effected without her feeling herself an accomplice in the work. But that was not possible so long as she countenanced what she knew to be a pretence on the part of the viscount, which enabled him to push on his secret designs under a secure breastwork.

Then for Midas. However flattering it might be to Mrs. Sparkleton's vanity to exhibit the wealthy citizen in her train—however useful he might be to keep alive a spirit of rivalry in a more favoured admirer—still he was very tedious. He made love in a way that was not at all pleasing to a refined and high-bred lady. He was continually inflicting his company upon her, and it was not at all amusing. Mrs. Sparkleton was conscious of some degree of the ridiculous also in the affair. No one positively ventured to despise so very rich a wooer, but most people were struck

with the incongruity of manners and temper between Midas Gullibull and his intended. Every one concluded that if she married him at all, it would only be for his money—and reverenced the design. There was something ludicrous in the maternal assiduities with which Mrs. Gullibull overwhelmed her future daughter-in-law, excessively annoying to Mrs. Sparkleton. It was only by a miracle that Mrs. Sparkleton managed to avoid attending a drawing-room in her company! Mrs. Gullibull arrived about a minute too late, with the express intention of attending one of those solemnities with her. "She felt quite nervous," she said, "to go alone—such a mob of fine people, and feathers, and what not!" When we add that Mrs. Gullibull also evinced her tenderness by innumerable presents of things which Mrs. Sparkleton did not want, and did not know what to do with, it will be seen that to encourage Midas's passion was no sinecure.

Then with regard to her railway suc-

cesses. It was undoubtedly true, that but for the enormous extent of ground occupied by the alderman's manœuvres they could frequently have retired from the field rich with the spoils of such warfare. Mrs. Sparkleton's shares were frequently at a high premium, and Humson, in a friendly manner, advised her to sell out. But the glorious mirage which dazzled the alderman's eyes, also allured her on. They were both, in fact, in the condition of the boy in the fable who filled his hand so full of the figs in the pitcher that he could not draw it out again. The alderman continued to flatter both Mrs. Sparkleton and himself with the prospect of quickly redeeming their shares from the captivity they were held in, by large realizations he intended to make in his own business. He had a vast speculation in grain, founded on the certainty of the approach of a famine from the failure of the potato in Ireland, and the badness of the harvest in England. Meanwhile, ready money was essential to

both of them; and Lawless suggested to the alderman, who was more than usually ready to clutch at any expedient, that they should get Mrs. Sparkleton to raise as large a sum by way of mortgage on her estates as she possibly could.

The alderman had a conscientious scruple on this point; but Lawless quickly argued him out of it. He showed him that Mrs. Sparkleton's interest and his own were become so mingled, that it was impossible to separate them. Was she not, besides, to marry his only son and heir? It was a certain means of extrication from difficulties which began to press heavily on the house of Gullibull, Gullibull, and Co. Everything depended on the rapidity of the operation. If the stock were redeemed at once, and brought into the market, the money would be ready to meet the vast arrival of grain which the alderman expected, and which, if it sold at the prices to be expected, would make him half a million a richer man. Of course he ought

to pay all the expenses and interest of the mortgage, and throw some thirty or forty thousand pounds into the bride's lap, as a mark of gratitude. Nothing could be easier. Lawless had a saying by which he made all things appear facile. "It's the easiest thing of a hundred!"

It certainly is not difficult to persuade a man to do what he wants to do. The alderman found his account at his banker's extraordinarily low; he had been forewarned, from very good authority, that a heavy call would shortly be made on his and Mrs. Sparkleton's shares, and only a certain period of grace was allowed to the initiated to sell off. It was necessary, therefore, to act, and Lawless obtained permission to use his eloquence in persuading Mrs. Sparkleton to the step.

He was now turned regular sharebroker, and as such, transacted most of the alderman's business, and had free access to Mrs. Sparkleton. Lawless found her, however, very much indisposed to the measure he

advised, which he represented with happy skill as merely a temporary expedient to enable the alderman to realize their most splendid visions. He could easily have the money elsewhere, Lawless represented, but he would rather be obliged to Mrs. Sparkleton than to anybody in the world, and desired to keep his transactions in this respect secret, lest they should damage his credit in the corn world. Mrs. Sparkleton, indeed, was not guided by any maxim of prudence in her reluctance to accede to the alderman's wishes; but she had borrowed all the money she had speculated with, and the sums necessary to support her personal expenses, (which were greatly more profuse than formerly, after she became conscious of the greatness of the resources at her command) on her land and personal property, already.

She did not reveal this fact, however, which she felt certain would rather damage her own credit with her mercantile friends, and mercantile lover. She only alleged

that she had promised the colonel, her late husband, when he made his will in her favour, she would never mortgage, or otherwise jeopardize the landed property. This was true enough, only she had forgotten it until that moment, when it was convenient to remember. But Lawless was not at the end of his resources. He laughed at this as a silly scruple; then under pretext of respecting it, proposed that she should oblige the alderman with a few accommodation bills, which could be readily negotiated on the strength of "two such fists," as he expressed it.

Mrs. Sparkleton had already discovered the "facilis descensus" of bills, but not on the grand, the magnificent scale, which Lawless projected. Still she was quite ready to draw on the bank of futurity to any amount; her gorgeous assets there, she thought, were sufficient to meet any demand. Mrs. Skinflintz had of late become more and more stingy and demurring to requests, exacted still heavier discounts and

per centages, and for the last five hundred she lent, had even demanded and obtained a thing which Mrs. Sparkleton did not quite understand, but thought might possibly prove unpleasant if not redeemed. It was called a BILL of SALE. Lawless represented that both she and the alderman would thus be enabled to supply themselves with ready money, to any extent, and, long before the bills could become due, the necessary funds to meet them would be realized over and over again.

This project was truly delightful. Mrs. Sparkleton put her hand to any amount of paper that was sent to her, for the alderman's use, and drew on him, on her own account, for a thousand pounds. Luscious took the trouble to negotiate this last bill for her himself with a "friend of his," and brought her five hundred and thirty pounds, all expenses being deducted from the gross amount, which, he said, was an excellent bargain for an accommodation bill.

It was understood that these transac-

tions were to remain an entire secret with the parties immediately concerned. Mrs. Sparkleton never doubted the safety of her commercial dealings with so renowned and wealthy a firm; but she thought it would look *low*, unladylike, if it was known she made money in such a way. It may be believed that the alderman had still better reasons for concealing from the world the state of his credit, which obliged him to look to a private and female friend for advances on his signatures. Above all, he kept the secret as closely as possible from his own son. Perhaps he was not grieved to observe the slow progress made by Midas in winning his intended bride's consent to a marriage. Disputes had of late become frequent and vehement between the father and son, on the manner in which the former was conducting the affairs of the firm. Midas was greatly and justly alarmed at the vast increase in his father's bill-transactions, having no relation to the legitimate business of a corn-factor. The ready money of the

firm, so essential to its prosperity, seemed swallowed up! Midas longed for power to probe into the mystery of these proceedings, and restrain his father from a continuance in them. This was only to be achieved by obtaining the partnership, which old Gullibull very sagaciously made conditional on his son's marriage with Mrs. Sparkleton.

The latter bait became hourly more attractive and dazzling, even to the matter-of-fact calculations of Midas Gullibull. He had at least a sensual passion for the lady's beauty; his vanity was flattered rather than alarmed by the number of pretenders who appeared in the field against him. Mrs. Sparkleton's splendid parties made her the central power of th[illegible]atch. [illegible]nscio[illegible]d Midas forgave even her spe[illegible]t, a[illegible]ndencies, considering what a fine thing it was to be able to give one's self airs as the accepted admirer of so fine a lady.

Besides, all the world was bitten by the same madness. The railway fever was at its height. Doctors deserted their patients,

merchants their counters, lawyers their briefs, every man his proper business, to become railway speculators, committee-men, directors. No part of the world so distant, so wild, so hopeless, but had its projected line! Through the closest haunts of ancient civilization, through forests and jungles scarcely as yet traversed by their savage denizens, these iron roads were to break with all their rushing cars and steeds of snorting fire! None so high or so low as to escape the contagion. Emperors projected lines to double their revenues, and Mrs. Redgold projected the murder of an exciseman to get possession of his scrip. O gold! thou whose yellow worshippers (fitly thou bestowest thy beauteous tinge even on their complexions) now traverse oceans, wilds, and mountains, whose rocky sides hold them up to bake, like stranded crabs, in the sun, to thy latest shrine in California; never did thy sacred madness so fire the human heart as at the time whereof we treat, even in this

favourite land of thy worship, where thou lovest best to dwell, as of old the sun was said to rest most contentedly on the shores of the well-beloved Chilios!

END OF VOL. II.

Savill & Edwards, Printers, 4, Chandos Street, Covent Garden.